



## **Pain Killers**

*Jerry Stahl*

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## **Pain Killers** Jerry Stahl

“Often brilliant, always compelling.” — *Pittsburgh Tribune*

From acclaimed and controversial author Jerry Stahl comes one of the most vividly subversive, savagely funny, explosive novels yet unleashed in our tender century. *Pain Killers* is a violent and mind-wrenching masterpiece in the Gonzo Noir style that has earned Jerry Stahl his legion of avid fans. For those who enjoy the works of Chuck Palahniuk, Terry Southern, and Hunter S Thompson—as well as Stahl’s own *Permanent Midnight*, *I Fatty*, *Perv—A Love Story*, and *Plainclothes Naked*—*Pain Killers* is sure to please.

## **Pain Killers Details**

Date : Published March 3rd 2009 by William Morrow

ISBN : 9780060506650

Author : Jerry Stahl

Format : Hardcover 408 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Crime

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## From Reader Review Pain Killers for online ebook

### Bill says

I decided to pick this book up after reading Stahl's short story collection "Love Without" and as much as I hate to say it, I really feel like his tone and style lends itself more to the short story than novels.

Stahl seems to be trying to carve out a niche for himself in the post-Bukowski kind of hyper-macho world, and this novel seems like it sidles up alongside "seemy underbelly" books a la Warren Ellis.

My issue is, with Stahl, there isn't the bite that Ellis has. The stuff seems depraved without as much deeper reason, and the shock factor isn't quite as shocking. Yes, he writes good, depraved, kinda messed up prose that flirts with dirty, gross "what if" lifestyles. Basically, you get tired of reading a book where everyone you happen to encounter, from cab drivers to the random person next to you on the plane all have secret lives in which they are junkies, murderers, criminals, or perverts. It just doesn't ring true.

Still, having gotten all those gripes out, it was an entertaining book for what it was. You do develop an interest in the characters, and the screwy "don't trust anyone and nothing is as it seems" ends up resolving pretty well. I didn't feel like I wasted my time, but I can't give it a glowing recommendation either.

(view spoiler)

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### Kristen says

This is probably not a book that I would have selected on my own – having hated the movie “Permanent Midnight.” But when an AR copy showed up in my mailbox what choice did I have? In the end it was an enjoyable read – if not a bit preposterous.

The Good Guy – Manny Rupert: an Ex-cop, on again off again junkie with a bad liver, who married a woman he met after she killed her husband and he responded to the police call. He's down on his luck, and not doing himself much good – then a strange old Jewish man shows up in his house, beats him with a walker and hires him to go undercover in San Quentin

The Good Girl – Manny's ex-wife, soon to be ex-ex-wife he hopes, is a neurotic bulimic on again off again junkie/prostitute/opportunist. Her morality is questionable but somewhere under all that sex and junk – there's a heart of gold (at least we're told)

The Bad Guys – Oh there are so many of them, but to keep from giving too much away I'll only list our target, the 90 year old blond German man in San Quentin who swears that he's Dr. Joseph Mengele (Nazi Death Camp Doctor at Auschwitz).

So, crazy Jewish man with walker hires Rupert to go undercover as a drug councilor at San Quentin to determine if the crazy old German actually IS Mengele. Things go bad quickly as Rupert's ex-wife shows up with an Aryan Brotherhood leader who also happens to be Jewish. The people on Rupert's side might actually be more dangerous than the convicts.

The writing is verbally simplistic, a lot of people rant and rave about how grotesque this is – but as a horror fan, I've got to say – it's not that bad. Most of the disgusting parts are simply people recounting what

Mengele had done – which IS gross, but it's not extremely explicit in that respect. There is a lot of sex, drugs, racial slurs, anti-government garbage, and a whole lot of the German guy arguing about the good he did in the death camps – like slaughtering babies to cure cancer... that part gets old fast.

To be honest, this isn't the best or worse book I've read. The characters are all fairly despicable in one way or another and the plot only holds together loosely. At times you will find yourself shaking your head trying to figure out just how you're supposed to buy all of what's being sold to you here. If you are looking for something comparable – try Tim Dorsey- ADHD writing, spastic plot, and a lot of material to make your average reader cringe.

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## **Lori says**

Oh boy. This one was kind of painful. Which perfectly fit the title. It's like it was telling me subconsciously "Don't read this novel without pain killers".

I haven't struggled with a novel like this in a long time. I kept waiting for it to hook me. I wanted it to hook me. It seemed like it was always on the verge of hooking me. Like an itch you can feel, back between the shoulder blades, but can't reach it in order to relieve it. It was poised, right on the edge, and just never seemed to take the plunge.

It's inability to hook me ended up frustrating me. I threatened to put it down and never pick it back up again unless it delivered soon. It just sat there, this bulky mass of pages and words that failed to give me what I wanted. And I just sat there, too, muttering more threats and curses under my breath, as I turned the pages again and again, waiting for it to WOW me. Waiting for it to hook me.

Then I began to beg it, and plead with it. Please, I whispered in a little voice, please just reach out and grab me. That's not too much to ask, is it? And still, the book just sat there. And still, I kept turning the pages.

I should have just dropped it, left it there on the bookshelf, with the bookmark holding the page I would never return to. I should have been strong. To teach it a lesson. To show it that I would not be taken advantage of. That it could not just sit there like that, teasing me like that, always remaining on the edge like that.

But it had me wrapped around it's massive wordy little finger. I was it's bitch. And it knew it. And it never fucking delivered.

Bet it's having the last laugh right now. While I sit here stewing over the 7 days I spent with the book that just would not deliver.

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## **J.C. says**

### **Good But Disappointing**

#### *Brief Synopsis:*

Manny Rupert is a former cop and sometimes former recovering drug addict. In the opening third of the book we see just how difficult life is for Rupert as we are introduced to his struggles with his ex-wife, drugs,

money, and general poor decision making skills. He is "asked" to go undercover at San Quentin as a addiction instructor to determine if one of the inmates is a believed to be dead SS officer from the days of the Holocaust. With nothing to lose (and seemingly nothing to gain), Rupert agrees and is introduced to host of bizarre characters and situations.

*General Impressions:*

I love a good, dark, gritty story as much as anything. PAIN KILLERS certainly falls into that category as all the back stories are revealed of not only Rupert, but also his ex-wife, the inmates, and the correctional facility employees. Unfortunately, I just could not bring myself to love this story. Typically I tear through novels of a similar nature, but the slow pace and seemingly irrelevance of the situations was difficult for me to swallow. I had difficulty continuing to read PAINKILLERS at many times.

I think the biggest setback for PAIN KILLERS is the fact that situations arise out of nowhere, and Rupert is often presented with decisions that border on completely unbelievable (or with no relevance to the story). The plot also moves very slowly (at least in the opening half of the book). Since I have not read the first book with Manny Rupert, PLAINCLOTHES NAKED, this could be part of the problem (although PAIN KILLERS spends ample time recounting things I assume to have happened in the previous book).

PAIN KILLERS suffers from a lack of direction, and while the readers knows exactly what Rupert's mission is, it is difficult to determine where and how he he achieves this goal while reading the story. Obviously, more information comes out that is important to Rupert (and the other characters) that change the motivations and the resolve of the main characters, but the pacing is difficult to stay interested in these things.

Despite these opinions, PAIN KILLERS is most certainly a niche book. If you like dark and gritty books, this should certainly be on your "to read" pile and you might appreciate it more than I did. There are other books I would recommend first, including the Hank Thompson Trilogy by Charlie Huston:

- \* Caught Stealing;
- \* Six Bad Things; and,
- \* A Dangerous Man.

Good Reading,

Plants and Books

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## **S. Wilson says**

I have a nasty habit of discovering excellent series in the middle. Very seldom am I lucky enough to read a novel with characters and situations that I thoroughly enjoy, and then later discover that they have been carried over into new novels. Instead, what often happens is that I find out a book I liked is from the middle (or sometimes end) of an excellent series, and I am forced to backtrack and collect the previous books.

Needless to say, I was not lucky enough to catch Manny Rupert, Jerry Stahl's flighty ex-cop drug addict turned private detective, in his first book, Plainclothes Naked. However, Pain Killers is only the second novel in a what will hopefully be a longer series.

Stahl's writing has always had an edge to it. Not surprising, considering that his real life exploits (as

recounted in *Permanent Midnight: A Memoir*) have been a tad edgy themselves. But it isn't the edge that makes Stahl's writing so good. It is the way he manages to combine it with a dark humor that doesn't flinch at the ugliness unfolding around it. A drug addict ex-policeman posing as prison rehab counselor in order to investigate a possible ex-Nazi in hiding shouldn't be funny. But then Stahl throws lines at you like "If I were a pedophile, I'd paint kittens." He knows what shouldn't be funny, and he knows how to make you laugh at it.

Manny Rupert isn't the kind of hero you root for because he's one of the good guys. He's the guy you root for because, as depraved as he is, he's nowhere near as bad as the people he is surrounded by. Besides, at least he can see the humor of it all, as bitter as it may be. If you're like me, and prefer your leading man to be less than perfect, you'll definitely want to pick up a copy of *Pain Killers*.

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### **Michele Lee says**

I received this book free through the LibraryThing Early Readers Program.

Manny Rupert, an addict, a cop kicked off the force, an the ex-husband of a murderer, is back for round two. This time he's been hired to go undercover in San Quentin and determine whether a sick old man in for vehicular manslaughter is really who he claims to be—the infamous Nazi Doctor of Death, Joseph Mengele.

That's where *Pain Killers* starts, but where it goes is on an insane, gritty, noir venture through the darkest parts of society. *Pain Killers* is a humorous black romp if by humorous you mean “Oh my God they went there” and by romp you mean going by limo from prison snail back love shack to Christian porn sets to meth houses and mansions and back again. This novel is, to steal a line, truly, truly outrageous.

Stahl's humor is not for everyone, possibly not for anyone that possesses an iota of sensitivity about religion, psychology, the human condition, addiction, sex, or just about any subject. But there's a sort of victorious feel to seeing character so truly messed up still intelligent and stubborn and taking on the face of human evil. There's more talking than action, so the pace is not forceful or fast. At times the conversations while interesting and amusing come off as off topic, when the point is to solve a mystery. And the WTF factor is, at times, very high. But it's a wild ride, different from everything else out there which certainly has an audience in today's marketplace.

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### **Kelly says**

Hard to find much of value here. After three attempts to finish, I called it quits after reading about half the book. Perhaps some interesting characters but things quickly become so ridiculous as to be unbelievable and boring. Want to curse, great. Want to talk about drugs and sex, great. Want to say you have a book that emphasizes the raw side of life, great. But garbage story telling is just that garbage and it is time for me to take the trash out.

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### **kat says**

completely crazy but good.

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## David Henry says

unbelievably sick filthy and funny yet oddly sweet. a great great read

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## Patrick O'Neil says

Jerry Stahl is a bit of a manic. Or maybe he's more of a smart-ass, or hell bent on histrionics. Having read *Pain Killers*, Stahl's newest work of fiction, it is hard to say exactly what frame of mind, personality disorder, or introverted social skill Stahl is channeling. Yet it is glaringly obvious why Stahl, a recovered heroin addict, chose opiates as his former drug of choice. If I were him I'd want something to slow it all down too. His mind appears to bounce around like a pubescent ADHD sufferer whose Adderall prescription has run out. Only it's been seventeen years since Stahl quit using, his mind has had way more than enough time to adjust to drug free thinking – and like anyone that has learned to cope with a mental health issue, Stahl has mastered what had perhaps once been a hindrance, morphing it into inspiration.

From the first sentence of *Pain Killers*, the pace is all out and over the top. Pop culture references, porn-star sexual innuendos, and hyperbole conspiracy theories come popping off the page like Stahl's suffering from Turrets syndrome and just can't help himself when he throws in one more smart-ass quip.

*To read the rest of this review, please follow this link to The Sylvan Echo's Book Review page.*

*\*\*Note: scroll down the page to the second review, thank you...*

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## Jason says

I usually love Jerry Stahl, but this book is fucking terrible. The premise is interesting, that Joseph Mengele is alive and imprisoned in San Quentin - that's a fun concept to work with... Unfortunately, Stahl doesn't pull it off at all. No, instead I read this vile piece of shit, hoping it might at some point redeem itself, but it never does. It just rambles on and on, meandering around aimlessly.

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## Denise says

4.0 out of 5 stars Horrific. Funny. Totally irreverant., March 4, 2009

This review is from: *Pain Killers: A Novel* (Hardcover)

In a style similar to *Rant: The Oral Biography of Buster Casey*, Stahl takes us on a roller coaster ride into San Quentin prison with ex cop Manny Rubert where he is working undercover to prove that one of the prisoners is indeed Josef Mengele, the supposed dead Nazi Angel of Death.

A recovering polydrug addict, Manny (who is also Jewish) is pretending to lead a drug addiction recovery group that includes Mengele. Just why was he hired for this operation, and what do those in charge actually want him to do with the proof that Mengele lives? And what will they actually do with Mengele? Bring him to trial? Kill him in prison? What does Mengele deserve once he's revealed as the monster of the Holocaust? Was he a brilliant scientist or an evil instrument of death?

These questions and the ensuing encounters with a score of bizarre characters take the reader on a trip through the past and into the present with a resounding jolt. The revelations of what Mengele did in the death camps are not particularly new, but the excuses and reasoning that he offers to his audience on a hair raising van excursion, are both shocking and repellant.

I have never read a book quite like this and found it difficult to write a review of it. I can't honestly say I "liked" it, but wow, what an incredible tale this author weaves. The motley crew of associates and characters in the novel look like a circus freak show. The chapter titles read like a sociopathic menu - nothing is left untouched from drugs, sex and torture to animal -- human organ transplants and big pharma conspiracies. Each page brought a new astonishment - what imagination and what a deviant mind this ingeniously demented author has! The style made me zip through the pages, turning them to see what in the world would be offered up for my digestion on the next one.

It was quite a book - took me from laugh out loud to the brink of nausea.

If you like to step out of your comfort zone and be transported into the strangest prison book you've ever read - take a chance. I guarantee you'll spend most of your reading time with your mouth hanging open and your brain forming the word -- WHAT!?!?!?!?

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### **Miss Deed says**

I read it three times and I am still not sure if this novel is a masterpiece or a fucking mess. The truth is its probably a lot of both. They're never gonna give this book any prizes but it could fly as a David Lynch film or better yet a Cohen Bros. comedy. The narrator is an unreliable ass. The love interest is a homicidal codependent who Dr. Death recognizes as a fellow psychopath. Tina is the fatal flaw in the book because it's difficult to discern who or what she is unless you accept that this affable gumshoe struggling with an addiction to pain killers, Tina and this whole Conspiracy that never fully comes together, is really a psychotic paranoid nut case with ethnocentric issues, mommy hang ups and disassociation from reality. If this is the plot, plan and purpose of the novel, it's never immediately obvious to readers. There are no meta-fictional clues, no tell tale tropes and little of the self aware wit one expects from a farce involving fugitive Nazis, prison reality shows and the very real problem of certain Jews controlling most of the wealth in the world. That his woman wants to castrate him is not surprising given the narrator's annoying habit of indulging himself in pity, misogyny, fear and a kind of apathy I suppose is funny if you can call Call girls for Jesus on meth, matrimonial murder by tainted Lucky Charms, inferiority, addiction, prison gangs, masochism, infantilism, gassing stray dogs and shits and grins as well as the gratuitous murders of fkat Mexicans comic. I am not saying things are not funny. They sure as hell can be but when you refer to the Holocaust Museum as the Disneyland of Death and Stahl rebukes you for bad taste you gotta wonder if that's what he means to be.

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### **Katy says**

Manny Rubert is a former cop and addicted to pain killers (I would like to note that addiction is a behavior,

not a substance - those who really need pain killers are NOT addicted, they are dependent - those who are addicted react differently to the medication ... but I won't go into the whole thing here). He receives a job offer that is somewhat unusual ... he is asked to go into a California prison and try to confirm if a certain prisoner is who he says he is - Joseph Mengele.

Supported by a complex cast of characters, Manny enters the prison undercover and tries to determine the truth as to who the old man is. But this is only part of the story we are told - we also spend time with Manny as he investigates from different angles, as he talks to various people (who are all individually described and clearly defined, no matter how short a time they are represented, in a characterization typing that is nothing short of astonishing) and gathers clues and stories to support the final analysis as to whether the old man is or is not the Beppo, the Angel of Death, Uncle Mengele to the children he claimed to love ...

I loved this book, but the parts with maybe-Mengele made me feel like I needed a brain shower to wash off the gunk. Don't let that stop you - this is a wonderful piece of writing and you should definitely give it a read!

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### **Kristin Myrtle says**

It takes alot of guts to finish a Jerry Stahl novel. He never lets up and it's never easy, countless times I have been left befuddled and confused by his words. But it's always worth it. *Pain Killers* is good, very good. Compulsively readable while being simultaneously hilarious and horrifying. It's full of realistic characters and crisp, hip, pitch perfect dialogue. I think this is where Stahl really excels, he has a great ear for the way ordinary people from all walks of life talk. *Pain Killers* is, as is all his work, strangely romantic- the love in Stahl's books is always fucked up. **ALWAYS**. But it's still **LOVE** and he's unabashedly honest about himself and what it means to be **a junkie, an ex-junkie, a misfit, an outlaw, a miscreant and a dirty, scummy, scuzzy deadbeat**. I often find myself laughing out-loud while I read his books, at the sheer audacity of his verve, his nerve- I mean, really does the world **NEED** a book about Joseph Mengele alive and kicking? I say Yes! As long as Stahl comes along for the ride.

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