



Benefit of the Doubt

Neal Griffin

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Neal Griffin is a twenty-five year veteran of law enforcement. He's seen it all, from routine patrols to drug enforcement to homicide investigations, from corrupt cops to men and women who went far above and beyond the call of duty.

Benefit of the Doubt is a gripping thriller that exposes the dark underbelly of policing in small-town America, where local police departments now deal with big-city crimes and corruption.

Ben Sawyer was a big-city cop, until he nearly killed a helpless suspect in public. Now a detective in the tiny Wisconsin town where he and his wife grew up, Ben suspects that higher-ups are taking payoffs from local drug lords.

Before long, Ben is off the force. His wife is accused of murder. His only ally is another outcast, a Latina rookie cop. Worse, a killer has escaped from jail with vengeance on his mind, and Newburg--and Ben Sawyer--in his sights.

Benefit of the Doubt Details

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From Reader Review Benefit of the Doubt for online ebook

Janka H. says

Noir, gripping thriller about the power of abuse and the dark deeds what create the monsters. Or who truly is a monster?

Ben Sawyer is a cop with damaged good name, as once he has been brutal when cuffing the killer. And everybody has thrown him under the bus. So he returned with his family to his hometown to work on the local police station under his father in law. But Lars had a stroke and Ben his not in favour with the new boss. And his new boss is not a good guy.

Harlan Lee is free from prison based on a good behaviour - bud the good behaviour is not in his plans now. He is on a killing and manipulating spree to get his revenge. And one of people to hurt is Lars Norgaard - Ben's father in law, the father of Ben's wife.

Thrilling read! There is a little mystery, but a whole lead of intensity and crossing fingers for the good guys to fight the good fight! And they need it, as their adversaries are more than capable and have a whole lot of power. Yes, you got it right, there is more than one bad guy and maybe the convinced killer is not the worst among them.

And the book is more than 'fast&furious' kind of read (and it IS a wild ride!) - it goes deeper and questions the origin of the badness and the question of responsibility - you abuse the power you have, you create a monster. And you may suffer the consequences. Which may be fine with you (but mostly it is not), but the innocents may (and will) suffer as well.

As for the characters - personally I loved a sidekick character of Tia Suarez, tough-as-nails young cop and friend to Ben. I am sure that without her help, dedicated friendship and fire within nothing good would happen for the good guys. She is literally a firestarter and rightly so.

I also liked Harlan, somehow. Mind you, he is not a good guy. But under any other circumstances, he might be.

Ben, the main character, might grow a bit of spine much sooner! He needed a good push from Tia and I hold it against him. But his weakness is also the human part of him. He is not perfect. Aren't we all?

Richard T says

I ordered this from Amazon.com it arrived on 5/12/15 and I did not get to start it until Saturday 5/16/15 morning. I read it nonstop until I went to bed then Sunday morning church back to the book. Finished it mid afternoon! In the begining I had a problem keeping track of the characters, but once they were imbeded in my mind I could not put it down. It kept you in suspence til the end! I have read books by famous writers and this book can be on a par or better than the best of them. I think I see a movie in the future!

Nancy McFarlane says

Ben Sawyer was forced out of his big city cop job and returned to his small home town in WI as a detective under his father-in-law who is chief of police. He is resented by fellow cops who don't think he earned his

position and when his father-in-law suffers a stroke the acting chief tries to make his life even more miserable than it already is. At the same time a police scam 10 years prior sets off a chain of events that gets out of control and ends up with Ben's wife in prison accused of murder. Small town cops with big bubba mentalities destroy evidence and attempt to cover up the new crimes being perpetrated by the victim of the old scam. Ben finally earns the trust of another outcast officer and together they are able to figure out who is to blame for the string of crimes and more importantly, why he is intent on revenge. Neal Griffin may be a debut author but this thrilling, cleverly plotted novel exhibits an in-depth knowledge of corruption, vengeance, violence, and good police work learned from over 25 years in law enforcement.

T. Greenwood says

A totally riveting and satisfying crime/suspense novel with vivid characters and a twisty, complicated plot.

Jodi says

I don't like writing bad reviews. I hesitate to even post this, but I also use it for my own purposes in deciding what books to read next, what series I want to read more, etc. So here goes, keeping in mind these are my impressions only. I was VERY disappointed. I wanted to like this book. It takes place in Wisconsin in places recognizable to me. There is an interesting and good story in here, but it was handled SO BADLY. There were so many completely unnecessary mistakes. The ones about the legal process were particularly infuriating to me. I still have a hard time believing a law enforcement officer with 25 years experience wrote this. One example is the murder trial that was going to take place within 2 weeks of the arrest. There is no fantasy world in which that would EVER occur. There is no law enforcement officer in this country who would think that is possible. The protagonist Ben Sawyer is rather infuriating in his woe is me, I am all important way. In the beginning it made some sense that he is damaged by what happened in Oakland. There is going to be psychological fallout from that. It is going to impact his relationship with his wife and son. There was good stuff to work with here, but the author dropped the ball IMHO. It really was all about Ben. Ben who really was a TERRIBLE investigator in so many ways throughout this story. The highlights? It is a fast moving book, and Tia Suarez was a great character. However, those things can't rescue the other problems.

B Shea says

This book started out with a good interesting story line to get me hooked but then became too implausible. I do not recommend this book however it is the first book by this ex police officer author and I would probably give him another try.

Aditi says

"I want to commit the murder I was imprisoned for."

----J.K. Rowling

Neal Griffin, the Detective-Lieutenant-cum-author, pens his debut thriller, *Benefit of the Doubt* that unfolds the story of a cop who is fired but now works under his father-in-law, who happens to be a retired Police chief and of a prisoner who just completed his 17-year sentence and now has an agenda to thrive for revenge against those who put him behind the bars.

Synopsis:

Ben Sawyer was a big-city cop, until he nearly killed a helpless suspect in public. Now a detective in the tiny Wisconsin town where he and his wife grew up, Ben suspects that higher-ups are taking payoffs from local drug lords.

Before long, Ben is off the force. His wife is accused of murder. His only ally is another outcast, a Latina rookie cop. Worse, a killer has escaped from jail with vengeance on his mind, and Newburg--and Ben Sawyer--in his sights.

Ben Sawyer, a recently fired cop from Oakland PD, shifts back to his hometown, Newburg, where he gets a job as a cop under his father-in-law, who is now institutionalized. Being fired due to his mistakes, Ben is constantly harassed by his fellow officers as they think that he got a job because of his father-in-law. Harlan Lee has just completed his 17-year in the prison and is determined to take revenge against the officers who put him away that includes Ben's father-in-law. Eventually, Newburg becomes a destination for scandals, murders, corruption and many more crimes come to light. And on the blink of an eye, Ben's wife, Alex is falsely accused of a murder. Now will Ben, who has no friends in the town, be able to save the town as well as his wife?

Being a detective, the author surely knows where to pinpoint his focus while concocting this pot-boiler thriller. Well, I was arrested by the author's writing style, his carefully chosen words, the thrill, the ride and especially the mystery. The author did not let me guess or anticipate anything even for a single moment, as there is so much drama and thrill that kept me from turning the pages till the very end. That doesn't mean the author has fallen short with brain-twisting twists and turns, but I tell you what, it is better, if you leave the mystery on the hands of this mater story-teller to unravel it for us.

As for the pacing, the story opens bit slow, but later the mystery and the tension along with it builds up so quickly, that I finished reading it within a couple of hours. Moreover, the story is not only centered around the mystery but it also unravels around Ben and Alex's relationship and many more relationships. In the beginning of the story, Ben and Alex's relationship is highlighted with a crack in their marital life, but later it develops and grow along with the mystery.

The narrative is the real charm in this book as it is kept thoroughly realistic and feels like an inside story into the world of crime and justice through the eyes of the author. The vivid details and intricate and multi-layered plot made me feel like riding a roller-coaster filled with adrenaline-rushing actions. And from the emotions part too, the author have poured out his best emotions to make his readers feel deeply connected with the story line.

The characters are flawed yet holds an air of self-respect and strength among them. Yes, they feel very real, just like an every day character. Ben, Alex, Harlan and rest of the supporting cast are very well-developed. They achieved to make a bond with my heart which made me root for them till the very end.

All-in-all, this is a gripping thriller with a twisted plot that will keep the readers engaged and on their edges of the seats till the very last page.

Verdict: *A compelling must-read thriller for all.*

Courtesy: *Thanks to the author, Neal Griffin, for giving me an opportunity to read and review his book.*

Marianne says

Benefit of the Doubt is the first novel by American author and twenty-five year veteran of the California Police force, Neal Griffin. After thirteen years in the Gang Suppression Unit of Oakland PD, an incident of lost control with a suspect finds Ben Sawyer back in his hometown of Newberg, Wisconsin, “a place that on the law enforcement career ladder came in about six rungs below mall cop”. Working for his father-in-law, Police Chief Lars Norsgaard attracted the inevitable comments, but since Lars had suffered a stroke, the new Chief, Walter Jorgensen seemed intent on driving Ben out of the force. And Narcotics Detective Doyle McKenzie seems to be running his own race, disdainful of any input Ben might have.

Ben’s wife, Alex is despairing at Ben’s uncommunicative attitude since their return to Newberg, and takes solace in the company of Newberg’s latest barista and book shop owner, Louis Carson. Small town gossip murmurs about their association, but before Ben can react, Carson is dead and Alex is charged with his murder. His reaction leads to suspension from the force, and he has to rely on staff members loyal to Lars and willing to give Alex the benefit of the doubt, to help prove her innocence.

After a bit of a slow start, this turns into a fast-paced thriller that has a few twists and a dramatic climax. Griffin’s years of experience in the police force are apparent on every page as he subjects his characters to corruption, revenge, prejudice and quite a bit of violence. His characters have depth and none is wholly good or evil. Their dialogue is natural and Griffin’s descriptive prose is evocative: “The wet, sticky air would be thick with dragon mosquitoes patrolling the skies like military drones in search of easy targets”. An impressive debut.

Judy Collins says

A special thank you to Macmillan-Tor/Forge and NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Neal Griffin, delivers an edgy and cleverly-plotted page-turner debut **-BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT**, a suspenseful crime thriller of revenge, corruption, and murder.

Harlan Lee has one thing in mind. Revenge. He has seventeen years of rage and intensity, a reminder of all the things he missed by being caged. He is out of prison and has no plans to live the straight and narrow. A settlement of more than one old score.

William Petite, the DA who put him away. Then to Newberg, Wisconsin to include a former sheriff, Lipinski and Norsgaard, Newberg’s retired police chief, now institutionalized.

Ben Sawyer, a fired Oakland officer, now with the Newberg police. Ben was honest enough to accept the blame, with an encounter with a fugitive in Oakland, Calif. He had been a thirteen year veteran of Oakland PD. A sergeant in charge of the prestigious Gang Suppression Unit. He was a rising star; however, shitcanned back to Newberg, his childhood home. *A place that on the law enforcement career ladder came in about six rungs below mall cop.*

Ben happens to be Norgaard's son-in-law, married to Alex with twelve year old son, Jake. They both grew up in Newberg, and the place she met her husband, holding much significance. Alex has had a life of cops; an absentee husband and cop, Ben, and the other-her dad, now having suffered a severe stroke, possible brain damage and total loss of speech, residing at the Newberg Convalescent Center. Even though, Alex feels a sense of peace in this isolated prairie town forty-five minutes west of Milwaukee--this soon changes.

Ben has many enemies in Newberg. He is now an outsider, mistrusted by his fellow officers. A nonplayer. The Chief's boy. He had been thrown to the wolves by his own department, and tossed aside after almost fifteen years of dedicated service. Now he and his family are forced to return, working for his father-in-law and small town America.

Soon the small-town peace turns into corruption, evil, drugs, payoffs, cover-ups, violence, vengeance, conspiracy, and murder with increased tension in Ben's personal and work life. To further complicate his life, Harlan is closing in on him, next. Alex is accused of murder. He has to find someone to help him. He needs an ally. Who is to blame? *Can Ben go from disgraced to hero before someone takes him down?*

Griffin sets the stage slowly, for a taunt fast-paced, action filled compelling crime thriller of revenge and dark family secrets, leaving readers glued to the pages to solve the mystery, while rooting for their favorite characters. This cleverly -plotted multi-layered riveting cop procedural comes from an author who has the inside scoop with a career in law enforcement, and talents of an author, to follow for years to come. Looking forward to the next!

From revenge, betrayal and redemption, Griffin hits the ground running, as reflective throughout the pages of this smashing debut. Fans of *Karin Slaughter, Andrew Gross, and Harlan Coben* are assured to enjoy this adrenaline ride.

JDC Must Read Books

Mia Siegert says

Some parts of the novel were absolutely tantalizing. They were fast-paced, well-written, and page turners for sure.

Then the middle happened--rush central.

And the very end, with a little bit of a jump to the conclusion.

I'd have ideally loved to see the pace slowed down a bit in some areas. Griffin's writing style is so fantastic, I'm sure it would have been even more appealing.

RoseMary Achey says

Harlan Lee spent 17 years in prison. After being released, he makes all those who had a role in his imprisonment pay. His revenge is well thought out and calculated. Can anyone piece together this string of seemingly unrelated crimes?

I had a bit of trouble in the beginning of the novel keeping the players straight, but kept reading and so glad I did. This new author will keep you turning the pages.

Darcia Helle says

This is a crime novel written by a man who has experienced the inner workings of our justice system. I expected realism, and Neal Griffin delivered that aspect extremely well.

The book starts out a little slow. The author introduces several characters consecutively, giving us background into their lives and setting the stage for what's to come. While this reads fine, it doesn't necessarily blend well right from the start. The content also feels a little dragged out. The pace picks up considerably at about the midway point. From there, the action keeps a compelling pace.

I thought the plot was somewhat predictable in its direction. That being said, the twists did still hold my attention and keep me wondering.

My favorite aspects of this book were the characters and dialogue. Griffin captures the way people speak to one another, the way we hear but don't necessarily listen, particularly to those we're closest to. Each character has a unique voice. Conversations feel natural, rather than something necessary to move the plot forward. This is also true of the characters' relationships. The interactions feel genuine. We follow Ben and Alex through major upheaval, and we watch as their relationship sits on the edge of ruin. This unfolding was almost more interesting to me than the intricate crime needing to be solved.

A word of caution to the more squeamish readers: This book contains a few scenes with graphic violence. Griffin handles this well. Nothing feels over-the-top. This isn't gratuitous violence used just to make readers cringe. It's honest and realistic, but something to be aware of if you're bothered by graphic scenes.

Overall, this is an excellent debut by a man who knows his crime business inside and out. I'm looking forward to many more to come.

Marg Corjay says

Fast paced, gritty, lots of twists and turns.

Kathy Martin says

Ben Sawyer, his wife Alex and his tween son have moved back to their hometown of Newberg, Wisconsin, after Ben, who was a police officer in Oakland, California, had a meltdown at work that was caught on camera. He was more or less forced to resign to save the department embarrassment. He called on his father-in-law who was the chief of police in Newberg for a job. He was hired but not really accepted by the other police officers. Then his father-in-law had a massive stroke and a new guy, who doesn't like Ben at all, is chosen as the new chief of police.

Tensions are high at work and Ben is still dealing with the consequences of his meltdown when a convicted murder is paroled and decides to take his revenge on the people who framed him for murder. The current chief of police and his lackey who does the drug investigating don't want anything to rock their current boat. Both are siphoning tons of money off the illegal sales of drugs which could come to light if the murderer makes it to Newberg.

The supposed murderer - Harlan Lee - does come to town and kill a friend of Ben's wife Alex neatly framing her for the crime. The police chief and his deputy McKenzie are very willing to look the other way given that it might be a good way to get rid of Ben who is much too honest for them.

The thing that struck me the most through this story was how isolated Ben was both from his fellow officers and from people he might have known when he lived in town. His only support comes from the chief of police's secretary who has also been his father-in-law's secretary and a rookie cop named Tia Suarez who has an interesting and very useful military background.

The story was packed with tension and action. Fans of very suspenseful police procedurals will enjoy this offering by debut author Neal Griffin.

Yvonne says

Interesting enough that I finished it but it felt a little by the numbers. The author has impressive credentials in criminal justice so there was probably some authenticity about the police corruption and crime but it still fell prey to some stereotypical development the first of which is the super villain who gets away with everything.

I found it believable that a criminal would have one long con inside of him, especially if he had a lot of time to plan like our killer did here. But when he's subsequently hit with new information and had to do an abrupt change of plans for his next victim, he manages to execute it perfectly. That's not believable. In addition, he commits some other crimes impulsively that should have left a trail a mile long.

The pacing is too hurried and fast in the middle portion of the story as well. One minute there's a murder and then there's an arrest made that same night. This is done before the evidence have even been combed through and tested, DNA samples taken or witnesses verified. In fact a lot of the case hinges on an anonymous 911 call which seems preposterous.

I think the author isn't taking into account the readers weaned on CSI, police procedurals and real life crime stories publicized in real time know that arrests and evidence tracking takes time and in a big time circumstantial case, there's no arrest without first dotting the i's and t's.

Another issue I had was sometimes the characters weren't consistent throughout the story doing and saying things differently than what you expected in the first half.

This would have been a much better story if it wasn't rushed. This was the author's debut novel so hopefully he'll work out these little kinks. There was entertainment here but we just need better character development and pacing.
