



# Night Dogs

*Kent Anderson*

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## Night Dogs Kent Anderson

Former police officer Kent Anderson, author of the memorable Vietnam War novel **Sympathy for the Devil**, returns with a powerful new novel about a Vietnam-vet cop who still carries the war inside himself. Searing and brutally honest, **Night Dogs** plunges us into the free-fire zones of our cities, where the legendary thin blue line is breaking down.

The North Precinct of Portland, Oregon, is home to two kinds of cops: sergeants and lieutenants who've screwed up somewhere else, and patrolmen who thrive on the action on the Avenue. Officer Hanson is the second kind, a veteran who has traded his Bronze Star for a badge. War is what Hanson knows, and in this battle for Portland's meanest streets, he's fighting not so much for the law as for his own code of justice.

Hanson is a man who seems to fear nothing--except his own memories. And it is his past that could destroy him now: An enemy in the department is determined to bring him down by digging into his war record and resurrecting the darkest agonies of that nightmare time. And Hanson himself risks everything--his career, his equilibrium, even his life--when the only other survivor of his Special Forces unit comes back into his life. Doc Dawson is a drug dealer and a killer...but he's the one man Hanson can trust.

Night Dogs is an extraordinary work from a powerful and authentic voice in American fiction. Recoiling from the violence that Hanson deals with every day, the violence that is in Hanson, readers will also understand the compassion that drives him. A novel remarkable for its razor-sharp characterizations and dialogue, its freshness of observation, **Night Dogs**--and Hanson--will remain etched in the memory for a long time to come.

## Night Dogs Details

Date : Published April 6th 1999 by Bantam Books (first published February 1997)

ISBN : 9780553578775

Author : Kent Anderson

Format : Paperback 544 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Crime, War

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# From Reader Review Night Dogs for online ebook

## Bonnie says

This is so far afield from what I generally read that I have little to compare it with. I don't read cop lit, ever. This was recommended to me by someone a long time ago, and so I picked it up on bookmooch.com and put it on the shelf. I have no idea why I threw it in my bag for a long flight. (When flying I generally opt for things so light they float.) Wow. This is not your average police procedural. It is gritty and raw and so painfully honest. Really it is more about reintegrating into American life after Vietnam - or maybe not reintegrating - than about police. It is about racism, and alpha male BS, it is about unimaginable loneliness even in a roomful of people, and taking control of the wrong things just so you have control of something. By book's end, the way I look at the world had been altered. It brought to mind one of my very favorite late 20th century books, *The Things they Carried* (though it is very different other than the Vietnam theme). I recommend this unreservedly but it is not for those moments you are looking for something comforting or something with a true sense of resolution.

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## Robert says

As James Crumley put it in the Forward (and I surely can put no better), "there has never been a police novel like this. The writing is as strong as the material...the dialogue as solid as a brick through a plate glass window, and the prose as sharply precise as a linoleum knife across a throat. *Night Dogs* is not just a fine book. It's an important book..."

A must read for anyone who is willing to meet a part of America that is so in our face-- but which we can, and most often do, prefer to ignore-- and yet a part which has all of our same aspirations and with which we share so many of shortcomings.

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## Brian Grover says

When on vacation, I always really like to read a book set in the city/area I'm exploring. Laura and I went to Portland last month and our friend Jenny took us to Powell's City of Books the first day we were there - what an awesome book store! I always love the Staff Picks, and this place has Staff Picks on Staff Picks - a different section in every room I went into. I picked this book up there, because they tabbed it "easily the best novel ever written about the city of Portland."

It's a pretty straightforward "cop novel", set in the 1970s, about a decorated Vietnam vet named Hanson who patrols the rough streets of northeast Portland with his partner Dana. I really liked the random police business they transact throughout the book - just their day to day interactions with locals and crooks. Kent Anderson was a cop in Portland for years before he wrote this, and this stuff feels really authentic (if depressing).

There are a couple of overarching storylines here that don't work so well, one about a lunatic serial killer and one about a buddy of Hanson's from Nam who crosses his path and has turned to a life of crime. The other thing that's a bit problematic (although not doubting the realism here) is that Hanson is almost constantly

filled with a homicidal rage dating back to Vietnam, and his thoughts are really dark - he hates "liberals" with such a passion it's literally crazy. That's not a black mark for the book, but it certainly made it tougher for me to identify with the protagonist here.

In closing, this is a pretty good read, especially if this is your genre - but if this is the best book ever written about Portland, they need to write more books about Portland.

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## **Gary says**

### **Bitter Truth**

There are a lot of reasons not to read Kent Anderson's "Night Dogs". Aging Viet Nam War protestors, dusting off old placards and tired slogans to recycle for the War in Iraq, will be infuriated with Anderson's laser-focused skewering of the liberal mindset. Those wishing to maintain a romantic view of an idyllic northwest paradise will risk having these illusions shattered by Anderson's Portland's mean streets of depravity and violence. If you prefer neat little stories ending with the bad guys rightfully dispatched, you'll find little redemption here. And anyone with the slightest affection for dogs or kids will cringe in the raw reality of this unvarnished tale of a street cop's nightly grind in post-Viet Nam America. So while there are lots of reasons not to read "Night Dogs", you'd be missing a powerful example of American fiction at its best, a gut-wrenching and emotionally draining dissection of pop culture cleverly (and brutally) disguised as a crime novel.

Street cop "Hanson" is a unique and tragic hero - an Army Special Forces veteran from Viet Nam, returning to test his well-honed skills for survival and violence in Portland's worst neighborhoods. Loosely autobiographical, the two decades that have passed since the end of the war and the writing of "Night Dogs" have done little to blunt the ferocity and passion of Anderson's lean prose. Far from Dirty Harry, Anderson's stoic and cynical loner Hanson delivers his brand of street justice without theatrics - he is simply the cop on his beat doing his job while doing his best to bury the daily horror show of his life with drugs, alcohol, and rough sex. Non linear with little allegiance to a central plot, the reader is led in stops and starts from the jungles of Viet Nam to the night shift in a Portland patrol car. Make no mistake - this is not a "pleasant" read. Brutal and violent - the "dog lab" is one of the most disturbing chapters of fiction I've ever read - Anderson pulls no punches and offers no apologies. "Night Dogs" may shock you, it may enrage you, it may make you cry, but it will also make you better understand and appreciate a period of American history many of us would just as soon forget.

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## **Rich says**

An excellent send-up of how the system tricks youth into warrior culture then abandons them when it turns out that worldview is neither sustainable nor healthy. After meeting a teenage gas station attendant who wants to be a cop, Hanson thinks: "He should have been nicer to the kid . . . He'd never pass the written test and the interview, but why not let him have his cheap dream until the assholes and his own stupidity took it away from him? I'm an asshole, he thought, but there was something wrong with a person who'd wanted to be a cop ever since he was a kid. What kind of fucked-up ideas did he have?" -472

Anderson perfectly encapsulates cop philosophy here: "It was all luck and evil out there in the dark, Hanson

thought. The police couldn't protect anybody." -237

That's not news. The question is: how do we respond to that reality? The answer is old: "Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all." The point of Ecclesiastes to me is: fear doesn't keep you safe. Most of life is luck, and hard work can't hurt -- but don't expect a reward for it. Living a life on fear-based decision-making is its own prison.

The cops in this book choose to barricade themselves in suburban arsenals and surround themselves with like-minded folks. It keeps them neither happy nor safe. As I read this book, I repeatedly was reminded of the old Nietzsche quote: "Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster." Particularly chilling was Zurbo's switch to German when talking about weapons. I've met too many cops who speak with "grudging praise" for Nazis or consider Hitler "a great leader." No, he was a sociopath who lead his people to destruction. This book is a reminder to watch out for your soul. And that something needs to change about American policing -- it's sad that this book is relevant and contemporary, even though it's dealing with policing in the late 1970's. Change a few names and it could be today.

As someone who has worked in Portland criminal justice for 20 years, I was surprised that Anderson chose to use the names of well-known crime families here. Those names are still around. It was a courageous and honest move. Anderson does not sugar coat. His vignette of a PD at the courthouse is one I've seen 100 times: "a white dooper in oil-stained blue coveralls was combing his long hair with his fingers, one dirty hand, then the other, arguing with his pudgy public defender, 'The best we can do? Three to five? Maybe three? The fuck...'. She was one of those people who smile when they talk, no matter what they're saying. 'I feel terrible, too, but . . .'. -509

This book is not available on Kindle or Amazon at the time of this writing, so I got it from our library. I checked it out twice -- the first time I almost immediately returned it. The book opens by explaining how police officers would target and kill stray dogs. This is not a pretty book. But it's a good and important book, and (I think) a must-read for Portlanders. I'm surprised writing of this caliber is out-of-print.

The military dialogue is true. "I don't want Captain Decker upset, or confused. 'Cause then he might have to make a decision, and maybe do something. That means more work for me, and more time I got to spend listening to the captain. I hate that. So don't fuck up no more."

"Yes, Drill Sergeant."

"What you doin' here, Hanson? You're not like these other crackers. I mean, shit, you been to college. In spite of that, you're even half smart sometimes."

"They drafted me, Drill Sergeant."

"You enlisted. A three-year R.A."

"After they drafted me."

"Damn, boy. You could of got an MOS to keep you out of combat without taking that extra year, with that college on your record."

"I had to have three years to take the Special Forces test. I volunteered for infantry. If the fuckers are gonna draft me, then I want to see some war."

For a moment, Hanson thought Sgt. Washington was going to hit him.

"Now ain't that a goddamn shame you had to go to all that extra trouble so you'd have a chance to get your ass shot off--when you don't have to go over there at all. Too bad you wasn't born black, Hanson. Then they'd give you all the bad shit you want, all the time. They give it to you for free. God damn, boy," he said, jerking off his wide-brimmed hat, "you don't know . . ." -98

More white blindness about race, when Doc, Hanson's African-American war buddy, explains: "I was up in Cam Lo one Sunday afternoon. Got laid, had a few drinks. They were closing the camp at Mai Loc and I had a lot of free time. I was on my way back to the camp when a couple of MPs in one of those 'gun jeeps' pulls me over. Said I was speeding. Said Cam Lo was off limits and I was 'out of uniform, motherfucker.' Said I better 'produce some eye dee, motherfucker.'" He laughed and took a drink.

"Told me I was in deep shit, motherfucker. They didn't even know the jeep was stolen, and I had about four kinds of contraband in the back. This was about a traffic violation."

"I told 'em to go fuck themselves. I didn't have anything to do with their fuckin' army."

"White guys?" Hanson said.

"Sorry-ass, sad sack-looking motherfuckers too. The one with the peckerwood accent tells me, 'You're under arrest,' Doc said, imitating a white southern accent. "'Get back in your vee-hicle, clear your weapon, and follow us.'"

"I told them to suck my black dick, and walked back to the jeep. 'If that's the way you want to play, we can play too. You just used up all your civil rights, nigger.' he says." Doc clapped his hands, laughed, and shook his head. Hanson felt himself grinning.

"Motherfucker's gonna handcuff me. He reaches out to take my arm, you know? When I pull it away, he gives me what I guess was his bad-ass look, and puts his hand on his .45.

"There's a war going on and these two think they're fucking with some barefoot nigger in Alabama or Mississippi or some fucked-up place like that. Hey, we're five miles north of Cam Lo, nowhere fucking Vietnam. Nobody else around except Charlie, who's gonna kill 'em if I don't.

"I ask this fool, 'You gonna shoot me or what?' He says, 'Turn around. Do it now.' Like I guess they taught him in MP school."

Doc laughed again, his glittering eyes meeting Hanson's.

"You smoked 'em," Hanson said. "Didn't you?"

"My Car-15 right there in the jeep. Dump motherfuckers stood there looking at me. Eyes like this. Mouth open 'Oohhh.' No wonder we lost the war.

"On the way back to camp I started to worry. Everybody would have thought Charlie did it, but I let myself get worried. I told Sergeant Major that I needed to disappear for a while. He got on the horn to a guy up in Omega. I had to re-up for a year, but the next morning I was gone. Omega so classified nobody could have found me. All the paperwork's gone now, since the bad ole communists took over." -208-9

I think the point missed (or maybe made) is this: if you live your life surrounded by weapons, you'll likely die by a weapon; live by the sword, die by the sword. Violence begets violence. Again, old news.

Anderson several times writes, "An armed society is a polite society" -- failing to see the exact opposite is what his book is describing. Guns don't keep you safe. If there's anything that science and research tell us over and over, it is that truth. If I have a gun, statistically it is most likely going to be used to hurt someone I love. Not a stranger, and not a bad guy. To paraphrase Justice Harry Blackmun, it is tinkering with the machinery of death.

Finally, the book quotes one of my favorite movies, *Maltese Falcon*, and one of the best lines: "The cheaper the hood, the tougher the patter." Brilliant writing and allusions throughout.

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## Johnny says

Dark and gripping character study. While the story is mostly episodic, there is still a strong sense of momentum pushing the story to its end.

Excellent atmosphere and sense of place. Too often genre novels choose convention over realism. This book maintains its gritty reality, while maintaining a strong sense of drama. Reminded me of Joseph Wambaugh with just a touch of the surreal darkness of DAY OF THE LOCUST.

The only fault it may have (my opinion), is that it's a little longer than it needs to be. Especially considering that the story doesn't really hit its stride until 150 pages in.

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### **Ross Cumming says**

Kent Anderson's *Night Dogs* has popped up in my Goodreads recommendations a few times and was also on a list of the ten best novels about Portland, that my elder son sent to me. However I think I may have previously read this novel some 20 years ago, when it was first published, mainly because it combines the two main topics that I used to read about and still do, the Vietnam War and American police officers. Hanson, our main protagonist, is an ex Green Beret and Vietnam veteran, who is now a Police Officer in 1970's Portland. He is a patrol officer who works the notorious North Division of Portland along with his partner Dana. The novel comprises of many stories and anecdotes of the type of crimes and incidents and people that Hanson has to deal with on a daily basis. A lot of these people are not criminals but are victims of the society in which they live and they are alcoholics, drug addicts, other Vietnam veterans and the mentally ill. The novel also plots the deterioration of Hanson's mental state while he deals with these people and also fights with his own demons. He is a violent man and a lot of the situations he deals with can be resolved by using violence but he also has to keep himself in check while around 'normal' civilians, as he sometimes has an urge to lash out at these people too. However at other times on the other hand, Hanson is also capable of showing great empathy and compassion towards some of the damaged individuals that he has to deal with. As with all Police procedural type novels it deals with the relationships, both good and bad, between the various officers and has some great dialogue and there is also a lot of humour, albeit very dark, present throughout the novel.

Kent Anderson, himself was a Green Beret during the Vietnam War and was also a Portland Police Officer and possibly the novel is part autobiographical or at the very least he has delved into his own experiences, which makes the book all the more realistic and credible.

Hanson is also the main protagonist in Kent Anderson's Vietnam War novel 'Sympathy for the Devil', which I also think I may have read, but regardless, I'm going to read it again once I manage to get a copy.

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### **Karl says**

This hardcover is signed by author Kent Anderson, and publisher Dennis McMillan.

In "*Night Dogs*" the protagonist from Anderson's previous novel "*Sympathy for the Devil*" becomes a crazy kind of cop in this continuation of his life.

The Place: Portland Oregon.

The Time: The 1970's.

I love Mr. Anderson's compelling writing.

Highly recommended.

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## James Thane says

Kent Anderson's *Sympathy for the Devil*, which was published in 1987, remains, I think, one of the best, if not *the* best of the novels to come out of the Vietnam War. It was a searing account of the war as seen through the eyes of one soldier, a young man named Hanson, who very closely resembles the author.

Anderson's second novel, *Night Dogs*, appeared in 1996, and certainly ranks among the best police procedurals I've ever read. The book is set in the middle Seventies, shortly after the end of the war. The protagonist is again Hanson, now home from Vietnam and working as a patrol officer for the Portland, Oregon Police Bureau.

Hanson has survived the war, physically at least, but it haunts his every moment, and he now finds himself in the middle of a new war, which is just as hard to decipher as the old one. Hanson is assigned to Portland's North Precinct, the ghetto and the worst precinct in the city. The commanding officers are all men who screwed up in other areas of the department and who were exiled to the North Precinct. The patrol officers are mostly cowboys looking for the rush that the action in the precinct provides on a daily basis.

The book has only the loosest of plots. One of the principal threads involves one of Hanson's closest friends from the war who has come to Portland and become a drug dealer and a killer. Rather than arresting him, though, Hanson attempts to help him, given that they bonded while in the Special Forces together and given that he remains the only man Hanson really trusts.

The other thread involves one of Hanson's fellow officers in the precinct, a guy named Fox, who hates Hanson and spends most of the book attempting to undermine Hanson's career. For the most part, though, the novel is a chronicle of the daily interaction between the police and the criminals, mostly small-time, who inhabit the North Precinct. It's a daily battle and an endless revolving door, with the cops confronting the same scumbags day in and day out, without making any progress at all in the war on crime. "Justice" is a very elusive concept here, in a world where the cops dispense what is largely their own brand of very rough justice.

At one point, Hanson confronts a guy who's giving him grief and shoots him The Look, which "was full of knees and elbows and night sticks, car hoods and concrete, broken noses, broken collarbones and concussions."

It's not a pretty sight, and this is not a book for the squeamish reader. Beautifully written, it's tough, gritty and ugly, but it has the ring of authenticity--much more so than virtually any other crime novel I've ever read. Anderson himself worked as a patrol cop in Portland in the Seventies, and one would imagine that, like his first book, this one is based very closely on his experiences there. It's a great novel and one that you won't forget soon. 4.5 stars.

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## Brian O'Leary says

Hanson, from one of my favorite books ever *Sympathy for the Devil*, is out of the war and now a run down cop. Not a good book. But I still cannot recommend *Sympathy for the Devil* enough.



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## Checkman says

I first wrote a review of this novel over thirteen years ago on Amazon.com. I was a brand new police officer. I had problems with the book. Didn't like the protagonist or the portrayal of police work. But then what did I know about police work? Well that answer is simple - nothing.

Skip ahead to the present. I recently re-read it out of curiosity. I discovered that this book is more truthful than I realized. Though he was only a cop for a few years (I believe it was three years in the early seventies) Anderson manages to capture the essence or truth (that's an overused word) of police work.

I haven't been involved with any questionable shootings and I don't carry a throw-away piece, but the changes that a person goes through after a few years are accurate. The anger, the sense of isolation and disgust that one comes to feel towards the citizenry are dead on. It's a constant fight to not let the cynicism destroy one's sense of purpose. Not trying to be melodramatic it's a fact.

A cop gets to wade chest deep into the ugliest parts of our society. A cop isn't loved like a firefighter. It's inevitable and we all tell ourselves that we don't care, but there are times that it sets our teeth on edge. Nobody (well almost nobody) likes ,or isn't bothered, by hatred or disdain. The anger that comes from this situation is made even greater when the people who are so vocal in their criticism of cops are (usually) the first to dial 911 when something bad is going on. Hypocrisy at it's finest. This and other things will affect a cop and how he approaches things. This book shows that and more.

The novel is set in the early seventies, but beside the clothes, technology and popular slang nothing has changed. It's a grim job and Anderson captures it. It's also a job that I won't ever quit even during the worse of days. Anderson doesn't see it that way, but nevertheless it's an accurate book. No it isn't thrilling and it isn't an action story. It's a drama and there are weak points with the narrative. Anderson later became a professor of English/Literature at Boise State University (my Alma mater - Class 1990) and there are times when the book is too "literary". Despite this read it and you'll have a better idea of what cops experience and feel.

Oh a footnote here if I may. This is a novel and takes place forty years ago. Much that Hanson does and says would ,in 2013, either get a cop written up (disciplined), fired and/or prosecuted (despite what many of the so-called "protestors" would have you believe). There are still cops doing bad things, but the system isn't as tolerant of those activities as it used to be. One may choose not to believe me, but I know what I'm talking about. *Night Dogs* is a novel not a documentary.

Yet another footnote. Even now in 2015 I stand by my last paragraph. Times have changed.

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## Craig says

Definitely not for anyone with ingrained preconceptions of what's correct, Anderson's writing style electrifies and dismays, taking his protagonist, both physically and psychologically, very far off the map and into experiential places where very few authors would consider taking their narrative. A semi-autobiographic continuation of Anderson's personal experiences as a former Army Special Forces operative and veteran of

two tours in Vietnam, *Night Dogs* picks up after Anderson's self-representative protagonist Hanson returns to the U.S. where he eventually finds some degree of direction and purpose serving as a police officer in Portland, Oregon. This is not an easy read for those who might expect formula plots riddled with clichés. Those elements are inevitably there, but only topically. While his more humane side is usually dominant, Hanson is often dislikable and crosses far too easily into the gray areas of law enforcement that makes him little more than a criminal himself, even if his actions are meant to facilitate the execution of his duties. When this happens, no justifications are given, no apologies made, and Hanson sometimes seems to take an almost sadistic glee in the violence he directs at anyone who might threaten him. One may be awed by his experiences, but there's no romanticizing or glorifying his martial past in the Army or his present role as a police officer. His proclivity for chilling violence is always just under the surface and Hanson's periodically destructive action is too raw, and too uninhibited to be viewed as anything but something sinister and feral, however much his nature is obviously non-malicious. Hanson is tangibly aware of his impulses towards violence, but he often lets go of his inhibitions and lets the rage flow outward. He's someone who carries his wounds close to the surface.

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### **Jim says**

One has to be careful assuming that a fictional work about police is historically accurate or insightful, because of the need of the author to tell an engaging, riveting story, which I think Anderson does, but I sense too that there is a lot of truth concerning law enforcement in rundown urban areas, in this case Portland, in the 1970s. The attitudes of many of the characters ring believable, though I doubt most cops would have done the same things the protagonist did. They certainly reflect stories I overheard from my father and some of his friends on occasions (my dad was a deputy during the late seventies, often in suburban areas). I enjoyed the book.

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### **Ed says**

Gritty cop novel set in 1975, post-Vietnam America (Portland, OR). Long treatment looks at the dark forces at work in the protagonist's work and life. James Crumley called ND the best cop novel he ever read. Excellent fare.

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### **Michael Martz says**

'*Night Dogs*' is a crime novel written over 20 years ago set in a period 20 years before that, yet it doesn't really seem dated. Yes, lots of forensic advances have taken place over the last 40 years that shape how police work is now performed, but the personalities and quirks of the law enforcement personnel, criminals, and everyday working folks are what really drive the action.

There are many unique aspects of Kent Anderson's 2nd book in his series that make it such a great one. The main character, Hanson, is a guy who doesn't undergo a typical character development sequence in the novel. You learn who he is by what he does, what he's thinking about before, after and during what he's doing, and though a few flashbacks to his previous life as a Special Forces soldier during the war in Vietnam. The book is almost entirely episodic and follows Hanson in his role as a cop in the Portland ghetto after his return from the war. He has a tough beat and a great partner. One theme involves a detective on the force who doesn't

like Hanson and is trying to his best to get him out of the Department. Although this is a book without a traditional plot, that's one thread that follows through to the end.

The 70s were definitely a different era. No DNA, no video, no social media, lots of paper 'paperwork', fewer lawyers, lots of drugs and guns on the streets (maybe not so different....). 'Street justice' is dispensed when the police think it's appropriate based on a lack of confidence in the legal system. Hanson's character is a truly complex one. He's a badass as all Special Forces guys were, yet he doesn't push that side of himself to the front at all and tends to downplay his war experiences. Getting inside his mind as he and his partner are making insignificant, as well as life and death decisions at times, in the course of their daily routine is a real trip. They're balancing paperwork requirements, overtime restrictions, precinct boundaries, past experiences with the folks they're dealing with, compassion for the ghetto population vs. disgust at some of its inhabitants... it's a truly fascinating insight into how cops, or at least one cop at that point in time, think. Hanson has lots of problems and 'Night Dogs' succeeds in not only exposing them, but also showing how they've shaped and will continue to affect who he has become. He's definitely a flawed cop, but a very human one.

Anderson's writing is very sharp and his dialogue is excellent. As you might expect, there's a significant amount of violence and action, as well as some sex, involved. Night Dogs is a bit long but it moves quickly, with each relatively short chapter representing another 'day in the life'. Much of Hanson's character is determined by his war years, which I understand are covered in the initial book in this series. Can't wait to get to it!

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