



Ruins of War

John A. Connell

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A chilling novel of murder and madness in post-World War II Germany...

Winter 1945. Seven months after the Nazi defeat, Munich is in ruins. Mason Collins—a former Chicago homicide detective, U.S. soldier, and prisoner of war—is now a U.S. Army criminal investigator in the American Zone of Occupation. It's his job to enforce the law in a place where order has been obliterated. And his job just became much more dangerous.

A killer is stalking the devastated city—one who has knowledge of human anatomy, enacts mysterious rituals with his prey, and seems to pick victims at random. Relying on his wits and instincts, Mason must venture places where his own life is put at risk: from interrogation rooms with unrepentant Nazi war criminals to penetrating the U.S. Army's own black market.

What Mason doesn't know is that the killer he's chasing is stalking him, too...

Ruins of War Details

Date : Published May 5th 2015 by Berkley

ISBN : 9780425278956

Author : John A. Connell

Format : Hardcover 372 pages

Genre : Mystery, Historical, Historical Fiction, Thriller, Fiction, War, World War II

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From Reader Review Ruins of War for online ebook

Andrea says

Picked up the ARC in exchange for a review for the local indie. This story grabbed me from the beginning and didn't let go. Would definitely recommend to those who enjoy mysteries and thrillers

Amanda says

A wonderful blend of my favorite genres - historical fiction and thriller/crime! DO NOT START THIS BOOK BEFORE BED, you will stay up reading it all night!!!! :-)

Kathleen (QueenKatieMae) says

Ruins of War by debut author John A. Connell is, I always hate saying this, a book that I really wanted to like. Setting the story post-WWII war-torn Germany with former enemy American army detectives investigating a series of gruesome murders sounded riveting. It's a brilliant idea for a detective series. But, in the end, the execution, dialogue, and some of the painfully one-dimensional characters sabotage what could be an impressive debut.

Barely seven months after Germany surrendered, the country is in chaos. Neighborhoods are destroyed, families separated, children orphaned and the threat of a long, cold, and hungry winter has descended upon the once proud country. To make matters worse, the presence of the American army antagonizes a major part of the population. There is no mutual trust or respect. Criminal Investigator Mason Collins, an American police officer with a less than stellar reputation, is the lead detective in a gruesome killing. A body was found wired to a pole, it's abdomen flayed open, the arms and legs missing. What complicates this murder is the possibility the victim was German and the bureaucrats running the Criminal Investigation Division feel the Germans should handle this case. They are unwilling to supply the necessary time and manpower for a German "problem".

Mason Collins feels differently, especially after a second body is discovered in the same condition. This becomes a point of contention between Collins and his unbelievably one-dimensional commanding officer. No matter how much progress or effort Collins makes in the case, the CO inevitably tells Collins it's not enough. His negative responses are inevitable and predictable. It gets old real fast. And I was stunned by his reaction near the end of the book when the killer kidnaps yet another victim. It's a race against time and he chooses to send his men on a different raid?

When Collins meets an American journalist, Laura, their mutual attraction to one another would be an entertaining diversion from the horror that pervades the story if it weren't for one thing: their flirty banter is laughable. And not in a good way. The dialogue in the book is not the best but it really flattens when these two converse. It reminded me of an old B-movie. In fact, the whole book reads like a movie script and when I found out that the author is in the movie business I wasn't surprised.

The serial killer has left mutilated bodies throughout Munich in bizarre displays that reminded me of the TV

series "Hannibal" and the reader finds out he is a creature filled with self-loathing and anger. His cruelty is appalling but I laughed out loud when he reminded himself what he does for a living. The reader will figure out who he is and what drives him to do such barbaric acts rather early on in the book.

The author's strongest writing comes from his commentary concerning post-war Germany. It's powerful and paints a vivid picture that leaves the reader sympathetic towards the citizens of the former Nazi regime. The hostility between the two former enemy countries is palpable, and understandable, from both sides. There are some good suspenseful scenes but if the story had been written more tightly the twists would have been more shocking and less predictable. And the author missed a perfect opportunity to better hide the killer's identity from the reader. He was on the right track.

This is the first book in the Mason Collins detective series but I don't think I will continue to follow it. There is some strong writing in parts of this book, but it didn't satisfy me.

Pamela Crane says

Dark and gruesome, this riveting thriller takes place post-Nazi Germany. Holding nothing back, Connell delivers unforgettable visuals of the horrors as a serial killer takes victims left and right, causing a relentless manhunt that seems almost impossible during an age when paper trails were bleak and leads were sparse. Connell writes with a compulsion that pushes the limits while gripping his readers. This book is not for the weak, but for those who enjoy a psychological mind game, it's a must-read.

Chris Ellis says

The historical aspects are great - reading about Germany just after WWII is eye-opening. The plot, though, relies on too many clichés to be truly good.

Not badly written, but entirely predictable.

I have the second in the series also, not sure if I will be reading it....

Michael says

In "Ruins of War," World War II history, a tormented serial killer and a highly motivated military police investigator combine for a satisfying and intelligent read.

Mason Collins is a former Chicago homicide detective who was fired from his job, allegedly, for accepting kickbacks.

He's assigned to Munich, Germany CID in 1945. The city is divided into military segments after the end of the war. Collins's first assignment is to view the victim of a murderer. The action ratchets up as Collins gets an investigation unit working on the case and the killer selects his next victim.

There's a snag when Collins' boss would rather go after a gang that was partially made up of U.S. deserters and there was a connection to the U.S. while the killer had murdered a victim who was initially unidentified.

What particularly drew me to the story was the World War II setting and the vivid descriptions of Munich with bombed out buildings, multitudes of orphans, and many displaced persons. These DP's came from people who were freed from concentration camps, German and U.S. deserters, soldiers who came from countries where they were forced to fight for Germany such as Czechoslovakia and general criminals.

Mason shows his tenderness in helping to feed orphans and in his desire to do justice and find the killer - at all costs and the reader relates to him and hopes for his success.

The excellent descriptions of primary and secondary characters was another entertaining element to the story. The suspenseful story had me turning pages late into the night.

Recommended.

Sharon Kane says

Rough story - a tad gruesome!

Dianna says

This was the book selection for the mystery book club at my local library. Historical fiction is not a genre I typically read if selecting on my own, but I'm so glad this one was thrust upon me. It was a great story, with grit and gore but not overwhelming so. It also gave me things to think about concerning WWII that I'd not known before. It made me curious enough to do more research on my own, such as the denazification, or whatever it was called. I also liked that it showed the thought process of the serial killer. One of the women in my book club complained of the amount of gore, but I felt it was covered well without going into immense detail. As I said, I don't usually gravitate to historical fiction, but I will read the others in this series. I loved it!

Lis Carey says

It's winter 1945, and Mason Collins, former Chicago homicide detective, now an Army criminal investigator, is hunting a killer in Munich. This is no ordinary murderer. He's dissecting and dismembering his victims alive, with surgical skill, and enacting strange rituals with their remains. Mason, having been a prisoner of war as well as a soldier, has no love for the Germans, but the horror is too much for him to accept his immediate superior's pressure: That this is a German killing Germans, and not a major concern of the US military.

Even if it means cooperating with the German police, he'll do his job as he sees it, and find the killer. Mason's newly assigned partner, a woman war reporter, a member of his old unit in Army intelligence, and a senior German Munich police inspector, all play important roles in tracking the killer, and following him into places where Mason's own life is in real danger.

What makes this more than just another police procedural is the characterization. There is no cardboard here, no one-dimensional characters, not even the killer. He turns out to be a very complex individual, someone beset by internal demons, and there are moments when the saner piece of him is even somewhat sympathetic. Characters on both sides of the American/German divide are decent at their core. The sheer bureaucratic and practical difficulties of trying to conduct a reasonably efficient investigation when records are entirely paper, many records have been destroyed, police and population legitimately regard each other as enemies, and there's a major language barrier. People who in more normal circumstances would be motivated to cooperate, are motivated not to.

Mason has to pick his way through this minefield, before the killings cause public panic.

Recommended.

I received a free electronic galley of this book from the publisher via Penguin's First to Read program.

Kevin says

There are no worse villains than Nazi doctors and this book solidifies their special dark furnace in hell that I'm sure is prepared for them. A solid chase after a serial killer through post World War II Berlin.

Sara says

I received this book for free through Goodreads. I enjoyed it immensely. From the very beginning, I was totally involved with the characters. Each character was well developed & interacted in the plot to make the story emerge.

Mason Collins is a military policeman with the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) after WWII in Germany. A serial killer is at work, displaying his work in horrible & bizarre ways. Mason, between helping orphan children, seeing a beautiful female war correspondent and trying to track down clues while fighting military red tape and working around superior officers who want answers, but don't always provide the means to do so.

I look forward to other books this author will write.

Kay says

A friend recommended this book as he knows that I like historical mysteries and this one is first rate. I enjoyed the setting in Munich, right after WWII ended. The writing is good and the story is compelling. That said, it is much, much gorier than I usually read and it also deals with a demented serial killer. Ordinarily I do not read about gore or serial killers so this is something you should be aware of. On the other hand, the book explores the interesting situation of being an occupying military officer in Germany after that country's defeat. I did like that angle very much.

Donna says

This is a mystery/crime book set in Germany (post WWII). The MC, Mason Collins, is trying to solve a case involving a serial killer. The murders are quite graphic. Sometimes it felt like a 'shock and awe' campaign. But with that aside, there were some great things that I liked about this, but then there were things that had me rolling my eyes. So I settled on 3 stars.

What I loved was the psychological aspect of this. I was pulled into the story because of that. I also really liked the the MC. He was a little too perfect but I liked his "normal-ness".

(view spoiler)

William Walter says

Although the setting is good for depravity (post-WWII Germany), that by itself does not make for a great (or even good) story. Way too much depravity, not much else to go with it . . .

Dan Downing says

Certainly, Mr. Connell tosses in enough grisly mayhem to his debut, although along with it comes plenty of cliches and little tension: we know all too well what is about to happen. Never-the-less, the characters and the post-WWII setting hold enough of our attention to see us through to the finish. The jacket promises a second in the series and indeed one has apparently been published. Doubtful I will be buying it.
