



Basket Case

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Once a hotshot investigative reporter, Jack Tagger now bangs out obituaries for a South Florida daily, “plotting to resurrect my newspaper career by yoking my byline to some famous stiff.” Jimmy Stoma, the infamous front man of Jimmy and the Slut Puppies, dead in a fishy-smelling scuba “accident,” might be the stiff of Jack’s dreams—if only he can figure out what happened.

Standing in the way are (among others) his ambitious young editor, who hasn’t yet fired anyone but plans to “break her cherry” on Jack; the rock star’s pop-singer widow, who’s using the occasion of her husband’s death to re-launch her own career; and the soulless, profit-hungry owner of the newspaper, whom Jack once publicly humiliated at a stockholders’ meeting.

With clues from the dead rock singer’s music, Jack ultimately unravels Jimmy Stoma’s strange fate—in a hilariously hard-won triumph for muckraking journalism, and for the death-obsessed obituary writer himself.

“Always be halfway prepared” is Jack Tagger’s motto—and it’s more than enough to guarantee a wickedly funny, brilliantly entertaining novel from Carl Hiaasen.

Basket Case Details

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Author : Carl Hiaasen

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From Reader Review Basket Case for online ebook

Xander says

Really enjoyed it. (I mean couldn't-put-it-down-enjoyed-it.) A top-notch detective novel—without a detective.

Hiaasen's novels are always twisted and funny, but this was especially good. The crime itself is not especially original, but the protagonist, obituary writer Jack Tagger, and the way in which the crime is uncovered through his impulsive (compulsive?) actions is unique and interesting.

The healthy dose of pop-culture references kept me smiling, too.

David says

Carl Hiaasen is in top form here, even if he differs from his usual narrative by switching to a single-perspective first person present tense narrative. This doesn't matter, because Hiaasen's writing is so good, his wit is so dry and the comedic timing so brilliant...he can handle any narration device with ease. The bonus of the different narrative is that the mystery is more focused, and it's his best in this regard. Hiaasen drops the usual environmental platform in what is an homage to classic rock, old rockers, and people who died young. Still present are the classic Hiaasen caricatures. I love the protagonist of Jack Taggart, an obituary writer who is death-obsessed that anybody's age is compared to the age of a corresponding celebrity's death. From the witty bantering in an overlooked newsroom to the climatic confrontation on a storm-threatened Lake Okeechobee, this is escapism fiction at its finest. Though not as prototypical as his masterpiece, "Sick Puppy", this book is probably just as good in its own right.

Kimber Frantz says

Jack Tagger is a 40-something journalist at a newspaper in Florida. He's been demoted from writing front-page articles to the obituary section for back-talking the new media conglomerate that purchased the formerly independently owned newspaper during a high-power meeting between staff, board, and executives. He becomes very interested in the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of a former punk rock star, Jimmy Stoma. Despite being told to stand down by his younger, less-experienced editor, Tagger investigate the death with the hope that he'll uncover a story that will put his byline back on the front page.

I have a real soft spot for mystery novels set in Florida that feature eccentric characters and describe the warmth and quirkiness of the sunshine state. I've read Laurence Shames and Tom Corcoran, but somehow never picked up a book by Carl Hiaasen until this one. I really enjoyed it, especially because it touches on the music business and the newspaper business, both of which I'm fairly familiar with, and the author's wry observations of the foibles of both of those worlds ring true. I'm kind of sad that this is the only novel featuring Tagger as main character, as the author writes prolifically, but all of his novels are stand alones. Hiaasen is pro-environment and you can see glimpses of it in this novel, but he doesn't beat you over the head with it. I'll definitely read more books by this author. Nothing too lofty, just good fun to read.

Kristen says

Other than "Team Rodent" I had never read a Hiaasen novel until this one. I had always heard good things and had listened to him compared to many of my favorite authors. Last night I read Basket Case (actually I finished it... I started it yesterday). Now that I have finally read a Hiaasen novel, I must say, I absolutely loved it.

First, it takes place in my home state of Florida, which I miss immensely so it was nice to be back there, if only in my mind. Second, Hiaasen is an extremely intelligent writer, I have read many "Humorous" books that border on insulting in the implausibility department when it comes to straining for a laugh. Hiaasen never crosses that line. The story is first and foremost and the writing style is smart, witty, and simple to read. You never have to go back and re-read a line to figure out what he was saying, and you are also never insulted by the childishness.

The characters are interesting, funny, charming, likeable, quirky and most of all, extremely human. I never doubted these people, heck I think I've met them before. The plot is interesting and plays out like a mystery... you find yourself really rooting for our leading man Jack Tagger. The book follows Jack, a once rising star in the newspaper world who shot off his mouth at the wrong time and was reassigned to the demeaning world of obituary writing. He now suffers from neurosis that come with the job... an obsession with death, mainly his own and how old he'll be when it happens. Up until now it has destroyed relationships and forced his career to dwindle to almost negligible. Then he covers the death of Jimmy Stoma, ex rocker and musical bad boy. Very quickly he decides that there is something strange about the death and the old reporter in him stirs.... And begins stirring up trouble.

The rest of cast of characters includes:

Emma, Jack's editor and possible love/hate interest
Juan the Cuban Sportswriter and Jack's best friend
Cleo - the dead rocker's wife and aspiring pop diva
Janet - the dead rocker's singer and arch enemy of Cleo
Carla - Jack's ex-girlfriend's daughter and club scene master

The crew gets even larger and more interesting... Colonel Tom is by far my favorite scene in the book, but I won't go into detail, you just have to read that one for yourself. In the end the book is darkly funny, engaging, and fairly high speed entertainment toward the end when everything starts hitting the fan. I know Tim Dorsey is often compared with Hiaasen, but in reality there is no comparison other than the setting of their books. Dorsey is extremely over the top while Hiaasen is firmly grounded in reality... albeit a strange and demented reality, but a believable one none-the-less. I would compare him more with Vonnegut (minus the sci-fi aspect) than Dorsey, Pratchett or Gaiman

Mike French says

Very enjoyable book. This book wasn't laughing out so much your sides hurt for a least 2 days like the Skink series, but was very humorous! If you like Carl Hiaasen and haven't read it ,you should!

Agumom says

I randomly picked up Sick Puppy by this author because I liked the cover (well done marketing team!). The heroes are flawed and quirky. The hero in this book is obsessed with death and writes obituaries. I am really enjoying this author. I mean, his books have yet to change my life or my perspective on life, but they're great to read on a lazy Sunday (cupcakes!), curled up on a comfy chair still wearing pajamas and sipping coffee. Or tea, you could sip tea, as well.

Jaime says

This book doesn't have some of the absurdity of Hiaasen's other novels, but it was quite good. The relationships are all very believable, and I ended up liking Jack quite a bit. The conclusion of the mystery is also quite satisfying.

Garrison Kelly says

Jack Tagger, Jr. is a middle-aged former elite reporter who has since been demoted to writing micromanaged obituaries after going on a tirade against his newspaper's corporate masters. Life is slow, miserable, and boring for Mr. Tagger until he's tasked with writing an obituary for Jimmy Stoma, a rock and roll icon who is believed to have drowned in an unfortunate diving accident. Jack's investigative instincts cause him to dig deeper into this case in an attempt to uncover a conspiracy involving murder and number one hit songs. Without the support of his supervisors, Jack has to make do with his relatively short leash and his modicum of clues and suspicions. Can he bring closure to the family of his all-time favorite musician or will Mr. Stoma's case go cold before it even begins?

Colorful, wisecracking characters are to be expected from Carl Hiaasen's thrillers and Jack Tagger himself is no exception to that rule. It won't matter whether the subject is sex, rock and roll, journalism, politics, or violence, because Jack, who happens to be the first person narrator, will always get a chuckle out of the reader with his commentary. A sense of humor is probably necessary for his necromantic line of work. Without it, he'd probably go crazy and there would be nobody to give Jimmy Stoma his due sending off. If he wasn't so dedicated to being a newspaper reporter, he could probably make it as a standup comedian.

But he's a truth-seeker first and a smart-ass second. He's dedicated to weeding out the BS of corporate news even if it means getting himself in boiling hot water. His dedication to his art form is second to none, so much so that he would have seen Jimmy Stoma's case through even after potentially being fired. In today's era, we need more honest people like him to deliver the world's news, even if that news tastes bitterer than a dissolved Xanax tablet washed down with horse piss beer. At forty-six years old, he doesn't have time for corporate shenanigans or dishonest scum bags.

Speaking of not having time, Jack Tagger's obsession with death is fascinating to read about, especially when he compares his own age to those of dead celebrities he once admired. Writing obituaries for so long makes him wonder when his morbid end will finally come and how it will happen. So many of his favorite public figures have died at forty-six years old and even at slightly older than that. His grim obsession has

driven his loved ones away from him despite their pleas for him to just forget it and be happy with what he has.

It's creepy to think about, but since it's a Carl Hiaasen novel, it's almost comical in a way. One of Mr. Hiaasen's gifts to his profession is his ability to mix seriousness with humor in a subtle way that doesn't take the reader out of the story. Trust me, there will be plenty of times to get darkly serious, especially when more bodies drop and living people mysteriously vanish. Despite Jack Tagger's disdain for guns, he just might have to use one in order to see this case through. You can still chuckle at his wisecracks, just stay on the edge of your seat while it's happening.

Of course, Jack Tagger isn't the only colorful character you can expect great things from. Jimmy Stoma, even in death, is mentioned as a party animal with a deep soul and undying charisma. Emma Cole, the twenty-something editor at Jack's paper, is a pain in the butt at first, but turns out to be a charming sweetheart once the reader gets to know her. Janet Thrush, Jimmy Stoma's sister, has a day job as an internet stripper with a SWAT team gimmick; if that doesn't pique your interest, I don't know what will. Juan Rodriguez is a Cuban immigrant who is so good at writing newspaper stories that he might as well be a New York Times bestselling novelist.

And then you have the characters that deserve a stone-handed punch to the face. Cleo Rio, Jimmy Stoma's widow, comes off as a shallow and spoiled pop princess with no appreciation for what her husband left behind. Jerry, Cleo's chubby bodyguard, is a little harder to punch in the face due to his fighting abilities, but that doesn't mean you won't want to at least give it a try. Loreal is a bogus music producer with about as much credibility as the corporate profiteers running Jack's newspaper outlet. Speaking of which, Race Maggad III (jokingly called "Master Race" by Jack Tagger) cares more about making money than he does about producing truthful news and his crippling budget cuts make that very clear.

The battlefield is set and the goofy characters are ready to clash with each other over the mystery of Jimmy Stoma's suspicious death and the fate of realistic journalism. If you want a well-constructed mystery with quotable one-liners and a reliable narrator, grab a copy of "Basket Case" by Carl Hiaasen. To my knowledge, he hasn't written a bad novel in all of the times I've read his work. I don't think he knows how to!

Mary says

Basket Case is the first Carl Hiaasen that I've read and it was pretty good.

What I liked:

- Pacing - the story moves and doesn't lag at any point. It was so easy to read that I was finished before I knew it.
- Humor (general) - it's meant to be funny and it was refreshing to read a mystery that was fairly light and without too much heavy emotion.
- Details about the newspaper business. It doesn't sound like a lot of fun to me but I can see how someone with the right personality would love the deadlines, the pressure and the general nosiness required to get the next story.

What didn't quite work for me:

- Jack, the main character, is 46 years old but talks about himself as if he's ancient. As it's written, I would think the target audience for *Basket Case* would be people in their late thirties to fifties. As someone who fits in that category (don't ask for more specifics) I was kind of offended that the character, and I'm assuming the author, thinks I'm close to being over the hill. Trust me, you aren't old at 46. Far from it.

- This is somewhat of a spoiler but you'll know it's going to happen pretty early on - Jack starts a relationship with his editor who is in her late 20's. Maybe I'm a prude or out of touch. Or both. What does a 46-year-old man talk about with a 20-something woman? I asked my husband this and he smirked and said, "They aren't talking." *Touché*. But, at some point, don't you want to talk to the person you are spending that much time with? And, having sex at the office? No thanks.

Would I read another Hiaasen? Probably...but I might look a little closer at the synopsis on the back to make sure it didn't hit any of the wrong buttons for me. 3/5 stars.

minz says

I would say that if I were reading it for a mystery I would have rated it higher (it was more a cheeky mystery than a comedy with a mystery) I think that is why the new readers marked it higher than his usual fans and the Hiaasen followers marked it lower. I usually like his work but it was a stretch to like this one. I thought that it just plodded along to a point that I was 75% done and wanted to stop. The chuckles (were not any really good laughs) were mostly just sarcastic comments that he makes to the bad guys.

Megan says

From Cynicism Corner

While Carl Hiaasen's *Basket Case* is still better than 90% of humor books out there, it is not one of his more successful endeavors.

Perhaps the biggest failing was the decision to make the novel first person, narrated in the present tense by the main character, Jack Tagger. Now, one of the things that made Hiaasen works so great in the past (and in the present) is the use of subplots that sometimes seemed to have nothing to do with the main story but which tie with hilarious results into the conclusion of the novel. My favorite example would have to be the finale of *Strip Tease*, in which everything comes together beautifully, including an apparently unrelated subplot about a wealthy sugar heir and his family's farm. Unfortunately, by making the choice to make Tagger the narrator Hiaasen limits himself in a way he rarely does in his other books. There can be no subplot to which Tagger is not witness.

And another thing about Tagger... perhaps I have no right to say that he is an author-surrogate character, but what else can one call a middle-aged journalist suddenly dropped to the obituary beat because of his heroism in talking back to the big bad establishment, only to inexplicably gain the admiration of his paper's former

owner, who offers him a hundred grand a year to take over some stock and mess with said establishment's head, gets the girl (who is young enough to be his daughter—twenty years younger), wins fame and admiration, is taken back off the obit beat, saves his paper, sends the villainess to jail, and is generally an all-around cool guy? But maybe Hiaasen's surrogate was Joe Wilder from Native Tongue, while Tagger is just some guy. I don't know Hiaasen, I couldn't say. But Hiaasen seems to find Tagger a great deal more fascinating than I ever did. I just couldn't root for the man. He was boring and self-righteous and snobbish and preachy, and coming from an author whose every work screams conservation of the Everglades while still being hilarious, that says a lot. There's a bit toward the end where Tagger monologues about the fall of the daily newspaper. It goes something like this: "The Race Maggads of the industry have a standard gospel to rationalize their pillaging. It goes like this: American newspapers are steadily losing both readers and advertisers.... This fatal slide can be reversed only with a radical recasting of our role in the community. We need to be more receptive and responsive, less cynical and confrontational... We're all in this together!" Hiaasen is kind enough to end with "Yet even as we do more with less, we must never forget our solemn pledge to our readers, blah, blah, blah..." (309-310) so that we are aware it's not to be taken seriously. But its unfunny ranting and so is Tagger's subsequent complaining about "polo-playing CEOs."

He also comes across as a trope hiding naked under the guise of a music buff. He is the Obsessed Reporter, who will do anything for a story and damn the consequences, the levies, relationships, entertainment, and your eyes. He finds blood on the floor of a wrecked home movie set and suspects murder but refuses to come forward and force the police to investigate because then he would be involved and wouldn't be able to write the article. The fact that he is an obituary writer does not deter him; he becomes obsessed with the ages at which celebrities died and constantly agonizes that he won't outlive Elvis. This, incidentally, is another instance of Hiaasen finding a character trait more interesting than it is. All right, it's amusing at first when Tagger informs someone he doesn't like that they have outlived Joplin and Cobain. But he does it again and again and again. Worse, when Tagger finds out his girlfriend/daughter-surrogate has been kidnapped, he still refuses to go to the police on account of the kidnappers are "too stupid." I don't buy it, book. The reasons given for Tagger not going to the book strike me as the carelessly tacked-on reasons of an author who doesn't care anymore, the kind of reasons Patricia Cornwell wouldn't have been caught dead using until a couple years ago. And to top it all off, he's a music snob. Everything turns into a Rolling Stones reference, and he judges people based on their taste in music. At one point he wants to like the man who ends up kidnapping his girl because he taps his boot to a song Tagger likes. Well, why not? I've liked people for less.

There were a lot of things about this book I didn't buy. The girlfriend was one of them. I never really believed her character arc from Tagger's angry, slightly incompetent editor into his feisty love interest (who still winds up getting kidnapped, by the way). Here's something to chew on, entertainment industry: just because two people don't get along they don't necessarily have sexual chemistry. Sometimes they just don't like each other.

But the biggest disappointment by far is the fact that it just wasn't funny in the way I've come to expect from a Carl Hiaasen novel. It wouldn't be fair to say it wasn't funny at all—I enjoyed the tale of Colonel Tom the monitor lizard and his activities after death as a bludgeoning item during a home invasion—but occasionally I got the feeling I'd stumbled into the wrong novel by mistake. The only Hiaasen-esque touch I could find was a man being scalped by his waist-length ponytail when it catches in an airboat fan. Okay, I admit that was pretty funny. But the rest of the finale was like a Mary Higgins Clark thriller, and the twist at the end, when a body previously believed to be cremated is revealed to be in the ground under a different name, feels more like a soap opera plot device. The fact that there is not retribution to the character responsible irks me.

When I first started this book, I thought maybe it was one of Hiaasen's first, that he hadn't come into his own yet while writing it. But when I checked the copyright date, it was 2002, nearly ten years after my favorite of

his works, Strip Tease, came out. While I'm not averse to a bit of experimenting in writing, I'm still pleased to say that he returned more to his roots in one of his latest, Star Island. I still hope for greatness from his latest work.

Tim says

Positively, one of my least favorite Hiaasen reads. In fact, it's closer to 1 star than the 2 I'm giving it because of a few clever lines by an obit writer in fear of his own fatality. 3 of 10 stars

Art says

Jack Tagger has been exiled to his Florida newspaper's obit desk but he has a plan to find just the right death to springboard his by-line back to the front page.

And when Jimmy Stoma's death notice crosses his desk, the game is on.

Stoma was the front man for an old rock group. Tagger suspects his death was not a result of natural causes. And the cast of characters inhabiting the world of Stoma and Tagger is a typical Hiaasen mash-up of likeable, colorful and potential Darwin Award winners.

Hiaasen, a longtime Miami Herald columnist, usually takes on politicians, environmentalists and builders. But some of his sharpest barbs may be reserved for the industry he loves most. This one is a keeper.

dianne says

A slightly off-kilter mystery about a dead punk rocker, his peri-pubescent brat of a wife (of a few months) a toss-up of residual newsroom characters, overarching goodies and baddies (media conglomerates) and some of the sundry tasty and tawdry types that one finds in beach towns of a certain size, there to be someone they weren't yesterday.

It isn't a book that will linger, or open any wondrous spectral insight - but it might make you giggle out loud several times. That's good.

James says

I am a big fan of Mr. Hiaasen. That being said I was pretty disappointed in Basket Case. It took me over two years to read this book, simply because I didn't care. It turned into the book I picked up and read a few pages in between the next thing I would read. The characters weren't as interesting as in Hiaasen's previous stories. The humor, which usually has me laugh out loud, was weak. Basket Case also lacked the pro-environmental undertones that he has become known for.

This is the first novel that I've read in which Hiaasen uses the 1st person point of view, which is the hardest, and I'm not sure if that is what caused this one to be so mundane.

Skinny Dip is next in line and I look forward to it, just not as much as I used to look forward to the next Hiaasen since reading Basket Case.

Pamela McLaren says

Watch out -- if you don't want to laugh yourself silly reading about former investigative reporter Jack Tagger as he claws his way from the obit section back to the front page by looking deeper into the death of an old rock star -- then don't pick up this book.

Because Tagger is on a mission and slowly gathering converts in his search into the sudden death Jimmy Stoma, the infamous front man of Jimmy and the Slut Puppies. It could be the story that will finally get him out from under the cloud called his smart mouth and mouthing off at the wrong time -- like to the new owner of the paper you work for. Just because you are right, doesn't mean that its the smart thing to do, especially as that owner is only looking at the bottom line and not the heart and soul of journalism.

But with Stoma's death, Tagger knows there is a bigger story. Something just doesn't seem right and the clues -- all discordant and definitely nothing Tagger can take to the police, or publish for that matter, are just part of the crazy fun reading created by Carl Hiaasen.

Hiaasen creates memorable characters with lots of heart --sometimes misguided and confused -- in wacky situations and its best just to sit back and enjoy the adventure.

Frederic Pierce says

Loved it. For a former newspaper reporter and increasingly devoted Carl Hiaasen fan such as myself, this book was a two-fer. The story is pure Hiaasen - a laugh-out-loud-funny mystery filled with outrageous characters, genuine suspense, a flawed and reluctant hero and an rock band called The Slut Puppies. Oh, and murder. It wouldn't be a Hiaasen tale without one of those.

But the story is also a period piece about newspaper journalism in the 1990s, when increasing corporate ownership and the resulting demand for higher profits decimated newsrooms already struggling to cope with the rise of the Internet and triggering the quality landslide that's resulted in the shallow, entertainment-focused drivel that passes for serious news these days. The protagonist is an obituary writer - a dying creature in the 90s and all but extinct today. Our obituary boy had actually been a hotshot investigative reporter who publicly embarrassed a new corporate owner and was sentenced to the newspaper version of purgatory. Solving the mystery surrounding a dead rock star may be his ticket back to the front page. Having lived through this messy era (and getting busted down to regional cops beats - twice) it really hit home. I highly recommend it to all fellow survivors of the newspaper biz.

Scott Rhee says

Carl Hiaasen is funny. But he's probably not so funny to a lot of people, namely politicians (Republicans and Democrats alike), the Aryan Brotherhood, trailer trash, people who spend thousands on plastic surgery,

plastic surgeons, Colombian drug dealers, tourists, pedophiles, supermodels, criminals, and dog-haters. I suppose if you're not in one of those demographics, you won't be offended by Hiaasen's salty disposition.

Hiaasen basically hates everybody in Miami, Florida, and he writes lovingly about that hate in his hilarious novels.

"Basket Case" is probably his most straightforward attempt at writing a murder mystery. Told from the first-person perspective of Jack Tagger, an obituary writer for a no-name local newspaper, "Basket Case" follows Tagger as he investigates the mysterious death of Jimmy Stoma, the front man for Jack's favorite rock band from the 70s, Jimmy and the Slut Puppies.

The official word is accidental drowning, but Tagger suspects murder, and when two other former Slut Puppies bite the bullet, his suspicions are confirmed. Unfortunately, he has no evidence. Fortunately, what he does have is Emma, his sexy young editor who has more than a crush on him, a frozen lizard in his freezer, a weird but not altogether surprising fascination with death, and more intelligence than the idiotic hitmen hired to kill him. (One of them is simply named Loreal. Yeah, after the shampoo...)

This is good stuff. Hiaasen may not be Pulitzer Prize material, but he's damn funny and is a good source for scathing social commentary. He'll make you laugh. What more do you want?

Mal Warwick says

Carl Hiaasen is a very funny man. His comic novels about life in Florida are always amusing and sometimes hilarious. Inept criminals, corrupt politicians, and bumbling police officers populate his books. Few come off well. For example, "A disagreement over lane-changing etiquette has resulted in two motorists pulling semiautomatics and inconsiderately shooting each other in the diamond lane of the interstate." And here he is in *Basket Case* (2002) writing about one of his protagonist's ex-girlfriends: "Among Alicia's multiple symptoms were aversion to sleep, employment, punctuality, sobriety, and monogamy. On the positive side, she volunteered weekends at an animal shelter."

Most of Hiaasen's novels involve the destruction of Florida's environment. However, in *Basket Case*, the author wades into a subject that is clearly at least as close to his heart: the steady decline of the newspaper industry. Hiaasen is a columnist for the *Miami Herald*, where he has worked since 1976. Here he is musing about the damage wrought to a small-town paper by its profit-mad, self-indulgent young publisher: "Only two types of journalists choose to stay at a paper that's being gutted by Wall Street whorehoppers. One faction is comprised of editors and reporters whose skills are so marginal that they're lucky to be employed, and they know it. Unencumbered by any sense of duty to the readers, they're pleased to forego the pursuit of actual news in order to cut expenses and score points with the suits . . . The other journalists who remain at slow-strangling dailies such as the *Union-Register* are those too spiteful or stubborn to quit."

Jack Tagger, 46, is one of the latter. He writes the obituaries for the *Union-Register*, a small-town Florida newspaper. He is obsessed with death, primarily his own. Hardly an hour goes by without his thinking of some famous person who died when he was Jack's age. He blames his mother for this obsession, because she stubbornly refuses to tell him at what age his father died. (Jack has no memory of the man, who left them when he was an infant.) He is terrified that he won't outlive his father. However, he's not happy thinking about anyone else's death, either. Funerals upset him. Autopsies are much worse. All this is highly unfortunate in a man who writes obituaries for a living.

Jack's preoccupation with death may go back many years, even before his consignment to the obituary page. But his present position "at the top of the shit list" at the Union-Register began only three years ago. He doesn't like to talk about why an award-winning investigative journalist was demoted so ignominiously to celebrate the lives of pet store owners, insurance salesmen, and fishermen. (Suffice to say, it was a very colorful incident.) But now a familiar-looking name has turned up in a fax from the local funeral home that may give Jack a way out.

Jack is almost as obsessive about rock music as he is about death. So he quickly realizes that the deceased, James Bradley Stomarti, 39, was better known years ago as Jimmy Stoma of the superstar band, Jimmy and the Slut Puppies. Jack sees his byline back on the front page if he can keep the story of Jimmy's death to himself long enough to gather the facts.

As Jack launches into the interviews that will serve as background to Jimmy Stoma's obituary, he quickly comes to understand that all is not as it seems. Perhaps the young musician didn't accidentally die while diving in the Bahamas. Perhaps the man's 24-year-old wife had a motive of some sort to kill him. And why are she and the people around her so eager to prevent Jack from learning what really happened?

These circumstances could be the basis of a serious thriller. But *Basket Case* is anything but serious. (Except when Hiaasen muses about the sad story of the newspaper industry.) For instance, here's where Jack meets Cleo Rio, Jimmy's widow: "The club's motif combines the exotic ambience of a Costa Rican brothel with the cozy, down-home charm of a methamphetamine lab."

The cast of characters in *Basket Case* includes several of Jimmy's ex-bandmates, who display a wide array of colorful behavior, usually involving drugs; Jimmy's sister, who earns her living dressing up as a cop on a SWAT team and stripping in front of a webcam; Jack's inept and beautiful 27-year-old boss at the Union-Register, whom he is attempting to persuade to leave journalism; MacArthur Polk, 88, the former owner of the paper who has been dying at regular intervals for many years but somehow always continues to rally; and Race Maggad III, the profit-obsessed head of the company that owns 27 newspapers, including Jack's.

I've also reviewed Hiaasen's *Star Island* (2010) online at "Carl Hiaasen skewers celebrities;" *Bad Monkey* (2013) at "A severed arm, a detective on the roach patrol, and a bad monkey;" *Razor Girl* (2016) at "Reality TV, African rodents, the roach patrol;" and two of his young adult novels, both of which I found disappointing.

Joanie says

I read this for the spring challenge. I liked this one more than *Nature Girl* but not quite as much as *Skinny Dip*. Hiaasen again brings to life some pretty funny characters including some of the dumbest criminals you've ever met. Entertaining story, pretty far fetched but still a lot of fun.
