



Lady Killer

Ed McBain

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I will kill the lady tonight at 8. What can you do about it?

Lady Killer Details

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Author : Ed McBain

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From Reader Review Lady Killer for online ebook

wally says

finished this one this morning, 8:36 a.m. if it matters. great story! and this one, too, kindle, has an intro from mcbain written in the early 90s, nice, as mcbain explains a bit more (like in the other intros) how this particular story came to be. says he wrote it in...was it nine weeks? had friends coming over and he was the last chapter and he wanted to go to the beach, after. so say we all. or wait now. nine days. he wrote the piece in nine days. heh! and too he writes about length...limit to 180 pages i think he said. so you got the economy of words going on, this, that, the other. i enjoyed the comedic relief in this one, the boys in the red striped tee-shirts, the cop talk, plus he throws in more than a few police artist sketches. always a plus. don't believe i've ever seen that before. good read. check it out. cue the song.

Craig says

Not as good as a locked room mystery but still intriguing. I am awed McBain could write an entire novel based on the premise. A note is given to the desk sergeant, "I Will Kill the Lady TONIGHT At 8 What CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?" This is the novel. Solving the crime in less than 24 hours using reasonable police methods for 1958. Remember this was before DNA testing and cameras on every corner etc. The story itself wasn't earth-shattering but I thought it was entertaining and clever.

James Hinton says

A fun, if slight, story from McBain. As noted in his introduction he knocked this one out fast before going on vacation and while that gives the story a propulsion there's not a lot to it. However it's interesting to see McBain experimenting with the format this early on with this and 'Killer's Wedge'.

While McBain is too good a writer to ever be boring, the story of Cotton Hawes wears a little thin sometimes. There's nothing wrong with him as a character (Though McBain does admit the character was thrust upon him) it goes to almost comical lengths to show what a ladykiller he is. It seems that Hawes can't walk into a room without there being a woman ready to jump him. It's happened so frequently since his introduction that I'm surprised he's been able to get anything done.

Out of the first 8, this is probably the weakest story so far and as a reader you can feel McBain (literally) racing to get to the end. The fact that it's all over with so little fanfare bears this idea out. It's still enjoyable, but we've seen McBain do better with similar material.

NancyHelen says

The best way I could describe this short novel, written in the late 1950's, was like an entertaining but not hugely detailed television drama - perhaps a TV movie. The story takes place over the course of a day as the cops of the 87th Precinct, battling the stifling heat of high summer in the city, have to try and track down a

killer who has sent them a note saying that he will kill 'The Lady' at 8.00pm that night. It is rough and fun and a book of its time, lacking the subtlety and complexity of modern day crime novels. This edition is made more enjoyable by the few drawings and illustrations that it contains, but some of the dialogue is a bit tedious.

However, it is the kind of book you can sit down with at 8.00pm at night and finish before its time to put the lights out, so in that respect, it was very satisfying.

Red Heaven says

Quite simply, this is one of my favorite books. Having just finished it for the second time, I admit there are some weaknesses to it, but I am willing to look the other way as the pace of the plot is fairly tight and there is much tension in the race against time to find and stop a killer with only a short cut & pasted note to go on.

I think the thing I like most about the book is its simplicity. McBain simply doesn't get bogged down in detail or more words than the absolute minimum needed to tell the story. Physical descriptions are rudimentary, just like the police sketches of the suspect, and the barest adjectives are thrown in to casually sketch the locations. In less-skilled hands this approach would be too bland and threadbare, but with McBain it just clicks. He apparently wrote this in nine days with no rewrites, and if so, it reads very well for an unpolished manuscript.

The end is something of a twist, and others might find it weak, but I think it adds to the book. If you can overlook some questionable procedural work (questioning a suspect and victim together at the same time) and suspend disbelief that a squad of detectives would burn rubber for a possible crank note, I think the book can reward as an entertaining piece of escapism for a few hours.

Nate Solberg says

Hardboiled fiction, fun! This was a hoot to read, because it felt like the script to an episode of "Dragnet". Sometimes I like to challenge myself with a book, but on other occasions I just want to have some fun. This definitely qualified as fun. It was written in 1956, so you have to adjust your perspective for lifestyles and technology that aren't really with us anymore. If you can watch an old black and white movie on Turner Classics I think you'll be just fine. I can see how it'd be comfortable to pick up novels from this series from time to time. This was a good read, and it'd be fun to follow this cast of characters. I highly recommend it!

Cathy says

Good fast paced book. The 87th precinct receives a letter made up of cut out words/letters that says "I will kill the Lady tonight at 8. What can you do about it?" It is currently 8:00am - the detectives have twelve hours to figure out who the killer is, who "the lady" is, where the murder is going to take place and stop it.

I was struck once again by the differences between the time this series of books was written (this book in 1957 I believe) and our own time - Lieutenant Byrnes sent the letter over to the lab to process for fingerprints, etc., but he also had the lab take a picture of it so that the precinct can try to figure out the clues

from the picture while the lab works with the original. What? Just take it down the hall to the copy machine! Oh, ok, no copy machine. This series is particularly fun to see the extra leg work the police must put in to solve the crimes because they don't yet have some of the technology that have since made police work a bit easier - no computer searches, digging through years' worth of handwritten file cards, hand-typing forms in triplicate with messy carbon paper, etc. (Oh... I felt so bad for them).

This was a good story and because of the twelve hour deadline, I felt more tension and urgency while the detectives went about their assignments and hunches, etc. to prevent the threatened death - or was it just a hoax to send them scurrying around for some nut's amusement? Read the book and find out.

James Thane says

First published in 1958, this is the eighth entry in Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series. By this point, the main characters were fairly well-established and needed no introduction, but the book itself is something of an oddity in the series in that most of the books have the detectives of the 87th working at least a couple of cases. This book focuses on a single case, worked by all of the detectives over a the course of a long and frustrating twelve-hour day.

As the team assembles in the morning, a young boy delivers a printed message to the desk sergeant. The man who wrote the message announces that he is going to kill "the Lady" at 8:00 that evening. The detectives have no idea if this is a practical joke or not, but naturally, they have to take the threat seriously.

In a desperate race against time the detectives work along parallel tracks, trying to determine the identity of the victim and that of the man who intends to kill her. As always, McBain provides an interesting and entertaining ride, although this would not rank among the better books in the series.

In a new introduction, McBain explains that he wrote the book under a deadline, in just nine days. His contract provided that he had to produce a manuscript of 180 pages--no more, no less--and that is exactly what he did. In order to do so, though, he added a lot of filler to what otherwise could have been a fairly short novella. There are a lot of extended descriptions of the weather and of various characters where McBain is obviously just attempting to fill space in an effort to hit his 180-page target and to get the book done as quickly as possible.

In less capable hands, this schedule would have almost certainly produced a book that would hardly be worth reading. But McBain is so good that even a book written under this kind of pressure turns out to be very entertaining and demonstrates what a talented and prolific writer could do "back in the day" when pulp novelists regularly produced several books a year. I wouldn't recommend that someone new to the series start with this book, but fans of the series will want to seek it out.

Curlyhair says

Again a good quick read, with likeable characters.

Greg says

BOOK 174 - Mid-20th Century North American Crime Readathon - Round 8

In McBain's introduction, he says he wrote this book in nine days. And it shows, compared to other books McBain has written.

Hook - 1 star: "A crank is a person who calls Frederick 7-8024 and says, "I don't want to have to tell you about that Chinese laundry downstairs. The owner uses a hissing iron..." and so it goes. And goes. More cranks calling in. Until a letter is handed to a desk sergeant that is very unsettling, but that could have taken place on the first line of the first page.

PACE - 2: After an oft-putting opening page, things get going. And this book reads fast until McBain, seeming to realize he has to up the word count to reach a 'novel' length, introduces a lovely lady in a negligee who has nothing to do with the story. She just sort of stands around too tempt the absolutely magnificent stud of a man, Cotton Hawes. Then another lovely lady is picked up off the street by a stranger who buys her a \$300 ring she admires in a jewelry store. Now, eventually, this does lead to the plot but I didn't believe the scene: no lady with self-respect would allow herself to be bought, on the street, for a ring, unless she's a hooker. And in this case, she isn't. So that's 2 scenes stretched to the limit for word length.

Plot - 2: A sergeant desk clerk, at 8am in the morning, gets a letter that "A Lady is to be killed at 8pm that night." It is interesting what the cops do to track the to-be killer, especially a sequence in which the killer's face is drawn with info from 2 witnesses. This story is a novella, but one supposes the publisher is demanding a novel-length work. And McBain holds a clue until the final few pages, so you're not going to be able to even guess what's going on, and minus 1 star for this feature.

Characters: 1: Carella is homophobic and I'm getting tired of hearing about it. Hawes has the ladies swooning: one wonders why this stupendous-looking physical specimen isn't a model or in the movies instead of a cop making 5k a year, it makes no sense. And by this 8th book, the 'stupid cops' joke is just irritating: you can't be stupid to pass the tests to be a cop. Personally, I have never met a cop anywhere near foolish. I know of people, though, who have failed the written portion of the test. And oh, please, please stop with the coffee jokes: the world drinks coffee. And about the would-be killer? Not much information is provided at all.

ATMOSPHERE: 2: Sweaty days, run down bars, coffee. And more coffee. And a lady in a negligee cause ALL ladies in seedy apartment houses wear very expensive, sheer negligees in which to answer their door or just to walk the halls. Yes, that feature is very much a part of the pulp fiction world in which authors were sometimes given a cover (with a lovely lady almost naked) and told to write the most sensational story they could based upon the cover. But this series isn't mean to be part of that world.

SUMMARY: 1.6. My lease favorite so far in McBain's 87th Precinct series and my least favorite of all of McBain's work I've read, including the short, "Sadie When She Died" (3.4) and the novel "Cut Me In" (3.6), pre-87th series published in 1954 and one of McBain's best. McBain can do so much better. 2 major issues: 1) this is a very good novella, but is turned into a 'stretched-to-the-limit' novel and 2) cops are smart and work hard but, for example, they gotta eat and stay alert, so what's the deal with coffee and more coffee? Am I being picky? Yes, but it's my review and I'm giving my honest opinion, equal to everyone else's opinion, equal in weight to the many 5-star reviews for this work. You, too, might love this and give it 5 stars. That's great!

Skip says

A young boy delivers a letter to the desk sergeant at the 87th Precinct, which has newspaper words that state "the Lady" will be killed at 8 PM that night. Steve Carella and Cotton Hawes and the rest of the squad try to

figure out the identity of the victim and the perpetrator through accelerated police work. The highlight of this story are the sequential sketches created from Cotton and an 8-year old's brief sightings. At 7:57, they finally figure out the mystery and rocket off to avert the murder.

AndrewP says

In the introduction of this book, McBain explains that his book was written to meet a deadline. 20 pages a day for 9 days. As a result of that forced time frame this is a very linear story. There is only one case and the detectives follow it from beginning to end with very little sidetracking.

The 87th Precinct receives a cryptic anonymous note saying that a murder will be committed at 8 pm that evening, so it's a race against the clock. The entire book covers less than a 12 hour period and reading this felt like an episode of the TV series 24.

These are great books if you are into 1950's detective fiction and need a quick, easy read between other major reads. I have another dozen or so on my Kindle and look forward to reading more of the 87th Precinct.

K says

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this book is explained in an updated foreword by the author. In it, McBain explains the circumstances surrounding the reasons he wrote this very short (180 pages) book in just nine days in the summer of 1957.

At that time, these books went straight to paperback and were to be exactly 180 pages- exactly. So McBain, who was on vacation with his family and soon to be joined by another family, hunkered down in a garage behind the rented house in which they were staying and cranked out 20 pages per day. Straight through, no rewrites.

That might explain the very linear nature of the story, the occasional filler, and the restriction to just one crime for the boys of the 87th Precinct to solve / prevent rather than the more typical multiple crimes scenario so common to this series.

As such, this installment suffers a bit and though entertaining, falls shy of the lofty standards set by McBain in this series. Taken for what it was back in the '50s, it plays just fine. A quick read that will be enjoyed by fans, but might fail to impress someone new to this author. Those folks would be better served to read some of the more involved issues of the 87th Precinct series before this one.

Michael says

A little boy turns up at the 87th Precinct with a cryptic letter from a killer.

"I will kill the lady at 8 tonight. What can you do about it?"

It could well be a hoax but can they take that risk?

Although this one is a bit contrived it's still a lot of fun as the 87th spends 12 hours running about trying to catch the letter sender before the hammer falls. Cotton Hawes gets to do plenty of the hero bit, though his

falling in love thrice a day is getting a bit wearing as is his constant explanation of how he got his white streak. I'm pretty sure McBain still hasn't got over being foisted with the big lunk and is deliberately sending him up.

Remember 'Cop Hater' the first book in the series and set in a relentless heatwave. Well this is another hot one. The year has gone full circle. It doesn't quite drip with heat as 'Cop Hater' did, but it's still a scorcher. Sure this one has its flaws but at this stage McBain/Hunter etc was knocking about three of these out a year, just as a sideline to his more profitable work. Eight books into the series and the first thing that happens after the last page turns is a hunt for the next one.

Tbfrank says

The primary virtue of this novel is it is short. Very simple and straight-forward, a "24" story before there was such a show, though compressed into about 12-15 hours. A letter delivered to the 87th precinct "announces" a murder and challenges the police to stop it. The letter provides meager clues for the dectectives to follow. Through a series of unlikely circumstances, Dectective Cotton Hawes crosses paths with the killer twice who escapes both times without revealing his identity or the intended victim. The novel, which McBain said in his introduction, was written in 9 days and could easily have been a script for any number of police shows in the late '50s, '60s, or even later.
