



## **True Crime Addict: How I Lost Myself in the Mysterious Disappearance of Maura Murray**

*James Renner*

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When an eleven-year-old James Renner fell in love with Amy Mihaljevic, the missing girl seen on posters all over his neighborhood, it was the beginning of a lifelong obsession with true crime. That obsession led Renner to a successful career as an investigative journalist. It also gave him post-traumatic stress disorder. In 2011, Renner began researching the strange disappearance of Maura Murray, a University of Massachusetts student who went missing after wrecking her car in rural New Hampshire in 2004. Over the course of his investigation, he uncovered numerous important and shocking new clues about what may have happened to Murray but also found himself in increasingly dangerous situations with little regard for his own well-being. As his quest to find Murray deepened, the case started taking a toll on his personal life, which began to spiral out of control. The result is an absorbing dual investigation of the complicated story of the All-American girl who went missing and Renner's own equally complicated true-crime addiction.

*True Crime Addict* is the story of Renner's spellbinding investigation, which has taken on a life of its own for armchair sleuths across the web. In the spirit of David Fincher's *Zodiac*, it's a fascinating look at a case that has eluded authorities and one man's obsessive quest for the answers.

## True Crime Addict: How I Lost Myself in the Mysterious Disappearance of Maura Murray Details

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# From Reader Review True Crime Addict: How I Lost Myself in the Mysterious Disappearance of Maura Murray for online ebook

Jeffrey Keeten says

”How’d I do?” I asked.

‘Your results were very similar to those of Ted Bundy, the serial killer.’

That’s one of those statements you just can’t unhear.

‘Don’t get too upset,’ said Roberta. ‘You may have the psychopathy of a dangerous man, but so do many cops. In fact, a lot of CEOs would have scored the same as you, or worse. Donald Trump is probably a sociopath. But it’s what makes him successful.’”

Ok, you have just been compared to Ted Bundy and Donald Trump within the space of a few seconds, but it is ok because your therapist has just reassured you that you are smart enough to control those compulsions.

Welcome to James Renner’s world.

To a normal person, this would be an unnerving revelation, but for a guy like James Renner this type of diagnosis is terrifying.

**He knows things.**

He knows things about his Grandfather Keith, predilections that were unchecked for decades, leaving a multitude of victims in his wake. Renner gets calls from the preschool regarding the out-of-control behavior of his son. The fear, of course, is that he has been a genetic conduit from his grandfather to his son.

**That will screw with your head.**

I make odd connections in my life all the time. Every time I read a book or watch a movie, I have increased the number of possibilities to experience a moment of serendipity or one of those peculiar tingling situations when I feel the dominos of the universe shuffling around for another play. Renner started reading *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* a few days ago. He stops in a strip club for a diversion, to change the buzz in his head.

*”She stood and, gyrating to the music, turned around. The bottom half of her back was covered by a beautiful, **inky-black dragon**.*

*‘Do you like it?’*

*I am no longer surprised by the weird coincidences that occur in my life. After writing about crime for some years, I came to believe that there was a kind of blueprint to the universe, a certain order to the shape of things. ‘**Fearful symmetry**’, I’ve called it.”*

Renner becomes obsessed with missing information, with missing people, with crimes that refuse to be solved. For someone with his psychopathic tendencies, is he really just living vicariously through the actions

of other psychopaths? To me the old adage “use a thief to catch a thief” is really relevant here. Who better to catch a psychopath than another psychopath?

### **The devil is in the details.**

Maura Murray just disappears. It was as if the Earth just swallowed her up. She is a good girl, but there are cracks in the veneer of all that goodness. She is promiscuous. She drinks too much. She has been caught stealing. She is rebelling against the set arc of her life. She is a world class runner, and one thing runners do well....is run.

Did she run or did someone kill her? As Renner investigates, he keeps hitting walls. The family has closed around the father, and he is showing up like a bad penny whenever Renner tries to get someone from the family to talk. Maura’s father doesn’t trust his intentions, and half the time the writer isn’t sure he trusts his own intentions either.

What made this book really interesting to me was the fact that Renner is inviting me to go along for the ride. He shows how he painstakingly works his way through piles of information from which he gleans slender leads and a bunch of dead ends. We talk to people who provide new lines of inquiry, and when a door is slammed in Renner’s face, it is slammed in mine as well. I can understand how Renner becomes obsessed with these cases. The police have taken it as far as they can take it, but if a guy like Renner keeps digging, he might just find that nugget that breaks the whole case wide open.

The missing woman and his life start to blur together. The problems with the case bleed into his personal life. His personal life colors the aspects of the case. It is impossible for him not to think about the issues with his grandfather without thinking about the problems with his son. Maura was very close with her father, and their relationship is a flag in his brain whipping in the wind. What does her father know?

He can almost see her. He can almost fit the eyes and hooks together. The truth is there, just barely out of reach. He sees improvement in his son. He reaches a resolution with his feelings about his grandfather. Sometimes writing a book is better than therapy.

Compelling and honest, this is one not to miss.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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### **Deanna says**

When I was offered the chance to read this memoir, I was pretty excited. I read a few of the previous reviews and it seemed like something I would enjoy reading.

There are times when I will go on a true crime binge. Books, documentaries, TV shows etc. It guts me when cases are not resolved and the families and friends of these missing people are left waiting for news of their loved ones.

I enjoyed reading this memoir, although at times it was very emotional. You could really feel how much James Renner wanted to find out what happened to Maura Murray. He became obsessed with it. His interest

in missing people and true crime didn't start with Maura Murray's case. When James was only eleven a local girl named Amy Mihaljevic went missing. Seeing her posters plastered all over his neighborhood got to James and from there his obsession only grew. He also wrote a book about the Amy Mihaljevic case.

In this book, James is investigating the case of Maura Murray. Maura was a UMass student who went missing in 2004 after wrecking her car in New Hampshire. To be honest I had not heard of this case myself but while reading this book did some google searches etc. and learned a lot about it. I can see how someone who is already interested in these cases could become immersed in it and want to know what happened. Unsolved cases are always toughest on everyone involved.

I visited the writers blog and while there is a lot of information from the blog in the book, it was still a very interesting read. There are a frenzy of theories about what happened to Maura everywhere on the internet. There also seems to be a lot of difference in opinion when it comes to Renner's intentions, especially online.

A lot of the book is about James Renner himself. It is understandable that after so many years of immersing himself in all the aspects of crime and especially missing person cases it would definitely start to take its toll. This was quite a personal journey for James Renner. We can see how deeply it affects him both professionally and personally. The word "addict" as used in the title is apt in this case for sure. From what I read, I felt that he was honest and open about all parts of his life and that made the read even more enjoyable. He wasn't trying to look perfect, he showed his true self..flaws and all. The reader learns a lot about Renner's family too. His young son's struggles as well as his own.

In the end I thought this was a really interesting and engrossing read and I look forward to reading more by James Renner.

Thank you to Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press and James Renner for the opportunity to read this book in exchange for my honest review.

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## **Wanda says**

### **"Closure is for doors."**

James Renner is a fascinating guy. He was told by his psychologist that his results to the MMPI test were "very similar to those of Ted Bundy, the serial killer" but that he also tests as very smart so he should be able to channel his darkness into socially acceptable work. He has a tendency to get fixated on things—sometimes those things are missing women. He flings himself into the investigations under the banner of "it takes a psychopath to catch a psychopath."

He believes in sharing his thought processes and all the data that he collects as he pursues the question of what happened to Maura Murray. It's a compelling and fascinating story and quite a number of people who regularly followed his blog become associate investigators with him, and he comes to refer to them as his Irregulars, giving a nod to Sherlock Holmes.

Of course, this public sharing also attracts its share of nut bars, one of whom has the nerve to publically threaten Renner's son. He manages to find a place of calm, but reports his feelings: *"I knew him for what he*

*was: a crazy man only pretending to be dangerous. And he had no idea who I really was: a dangerous man working really hard not to be crazy.”*

There are so many things that just defy belief—things that Renner refers to as *fearful symmetry*. Coincidences, strange synchronicities, things that verge on the paranormal. Renner doesn't limit himself to just Maura's case. He also throws in details from other cases that he has investigated, including his own family history, which has horrors of its own.

It's a wonder that Renner is as well-balanced, albeit medicated, as he is. His intelligence does seem to be mostly keeping him out of trouble (though his temper does get the better of him more than once). He writes one hell of a story that sucked up two evenings and made me resent the necessity to do laundry or feed myself. I'll be searching out more of his work asap.

Often, I think that I would like to have coffee with certain authors. This time around, however, I think I am just as glad not to know Mr. Renner personally. No offense, if you run across this review Mr. Renner, but I already have enough darkness in my life.

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### **Kelly (and the Book Boar) says**

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

This is a hard one to review. If you want to read something that makes sense, do not pass go and just move directly to Dan's page since he knows how to use his words. As for me and my experience with *True Crime Addict*, it goes a lil' summin' like this . . .

The backstory for the above gif is that back in 2014 I took my friend Trudi's advice and picked up *The Man From Primrose Lane* at the library. Then this happened . . .

Fast forward to the Fall of 2015 where I received a private message from James Renner himself asking if I would like to receive an advanced copy of his new release *The Great Forgetting*. My reaction to said message????

Renner went two for two with books that blew my cranky ass away. But we allllllllll know the hat trick of readability is an elusive achievement. Especially when the tables are turned and the author decides to leave fiction and go back to his roots of writing about true crime. Good news is, I enjoy an occasional true crime story. Even better news is, Renner is the bomb diggity when it comes to putting pen to paper. *True Crime* was as much Renner's life story as it was about the missing young woman Maura Murray. I'm going to spoil things a bit and say it's a good thing he wove the reasoning behind his addiction to unsolved cases into this one because this remains a cold case so there is no solving the mystery to be had upon turning the final page.

I'm not sure this would work for everyone if you're not already a Renner fan. That being said, he's one of

very few authors I recommend wholeheartedly, so give one of his other books a chance and you'll probably end up like me and want to know what makes him tick. Like Dan said, I too will read anything this author writes. Better keep up my A-game so I don't get passed up for the next ARC . . .

*Obviously an advanced copy of this book was provided to me by the author, but it didn't influence my opinion at all. The only thing that did bother me this whole experience was having someone who I blocked ages ago use a mutual friend to private message me and see if I wanted her to send me a copy of this book. Uhhhhhhhh, yeah person who I don't even want to associate with on the interwebs, let me give you my address. That's not creepy at all . . .*

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### **Kelli says**

Holy close to home! I went to UMASS Amherst. I cringed to repeatedly hear throughout this story the names of several towns neighboring mine (at one point I was in the town he mentioned as he mispronounced it). I remember this case well. Many aspects of this book make me never want to let my children out of my sight but being the daughter of a homicide investigator also does that to a person.

I listened to this audio read by the author. It was excellent. The author presented all the evidence he had gathered presumably in the order he collected it or that it came to him, and it was fascinating to see how many leads found him or evolved from something seemingly insignificant. There was an honesty here as the author not only revealed how his obsession with the case affected him but also allowed the reader into some of his own private personal history. With an affable tone and a down-to-earth openness, this puzzling horror story becomes something else in Renner's capable hands...addictive. This is very puzzling story with many oddities and contradictions, which makes it easy to forget that this is real. I pray that Maura did orchestrate her own disappearance, as any other explanation is devastating. 4.5 stars.

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### **Lorrie McCullers says**

I hated this book so much that I won't even bother with a full review. But I will leave you this: if an author in a non-fiction book refers to a strip club as a "tittie bar" AND spells it "tittie", that person has no business writing a book. EVER.

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### **Sara says**

Edit 12/15/17 This just in from Deadline: <http://deadline.com/2017/06/true-crim...>

*It would seem our dear Mr. Renner stands a very good chance of becoming the seductive anti-hero he's always longed to be. I may throw up.*

When you first see James Renner a few things become clear right off the bat. He's a tense guy. His forehead seems almost permanently wrinkled and his eyes fairly radiate with a gaze that's halfway between a puppy that just peed on the carpet and a guy who knows the girl he just asked to the prom is going to say no. He seems like a guy who bites his lip a lot and has a tendency to ask if you're mad at him in that annoying way that eventually makes you mad at him because he won't stop asking.

Mind you I've never met the guy but since it doesn't stop Renner I'm not sure why it should stop me. I've got plenty of photos of the guy and I've read tons of stories from other people on the internet who've had friends who talked to him or were like in the same zip code he was in one time. I mean hot damn that practically makes us related!

That's basically the entire basis of the colossal trash heap of a book *True Crime Addict: How I Lost Myself in the Mysterious Disappearance of Maura Murray*, Renner sitting at a computer making one insane leap of "logic" after another and judging everyone he encounters often solely on the basis of whether or not they'll consent to be interviewed.

Sounds pretty bad even for me doesn't it? But you guys remember my rules right? I'll try my damndest to stick to the book and not vilify the author unless I seriously believe he or she is a dangerous person doing dangerous things that can or already are really hurting people.

Then all bets are off.

James Renner wants to be special. You can almost see the things he must dream about at night. He's the first one the news outlets call when there's a missing person's case to consult on. He's the first one the shocked and grieving family calls for counsel when their child vanishes like a puff of smoke. He's the one who makes that fateful connection no one else could ever see and makes the collar. There are pictures of him with his fingers wrapped around some sleaze bag's shirt collar as he shoves the guy up against a wall and the headlines read "Pulitzer Prize winning journalist nabs serial murdering pedophile single handedly!" and "Scotland Yard and FBI in bidding war to make Renner head of elite missing person's task force!"

Or he's moving through the shadows of some dim back alley. He is not the law. He is above the law. The rules do not apply to someone like him, someone who moves through the world, among everyday, normal people with a secret rage the likes of which the world has never known. If they did, well, let's just say Renner wouldn't blame them for crossing the street when they see him coming. He stalks the worst, most devious sinners and he brings them to justice. His brand of justice. And sure it's grisly and stories have to be made up and things need to be brushed under the carpet when the people in charge see what he's done to yet another deserving child rapist. But he gets the job done.

James Renner wants so very badly to be special.

But he just isn't.

*True Crime Addict: How I Lost Myself in the Mysterious Disappearance of Maura Murray*, his latest book, is not "an absorbing dual investigation" into the disappearance of this poor girl and a look at the equally mysterious and incredibly deep mind of the reporter determined to solve her case.

It's a lot of insane sounding drivel written by a very sad, abusive, semi functioning alcoholic drug addict who wants you to notice him.



To give the uninitiated some background Maura Murray was a college student at the University of Massachusetts who, in the winter of November 2003 got into a car accident in the wilds of New Hampshire and simply vanished into thin air.

She's since become a bit of a siren's song for true crime buffs. Arm chairs sleuths around the globe debate what may have happened to her on blogs and Reddit threads the same way they talk about D.B. Cooper and the Zodiac Killer. They come up with theories and float ideas and sometimes someone finds a weird email or makes a connection. It's harmless because 95% of these people understand that while Maura might be a bit of an urban myth she's also a very real young woman with a group of very real family and friends who miss her desperately.

And then James Renner enters stage left with all of the theatrical, over dramatic grandstanding he can muster. According to this self styled reporter who's not actually reporting for anyone but himself he became obsessed (his word not mine) with Maura's case while getting a lap dance from a stripper who tells him about the time someone murdered her sister.

Let's let that one sit a minute shall we?

That's not a joke and nor is the first time Renner has felt what he'd probably call divine intervention and I would call the voices in his head directing him to "help" a missing girl. The very first line in the book jacket describes an 11 year old Renner "falling in love" with 10 year old Amy Mihaljevic when he saw her missing poster. Amy would eventually be found horribly murdered and her killer remains at large to this day though Renner totally knows who did it of course. It's all in his book *Amy: My Search for Her Killer: Secrets & Suspects in the Unsolved Murder of Amy Mihaljevic*.

Please don't read that either.

So, where were we? He gets a lap dance from a magical muse disguised as a stripper and decides he's going to find Maura. Obviously the first thing he should do is stand around outside her old dorm like the creepy stalker he is and following that "plan" through to its logical conclusion he should then get blithering drunk (like Maura may have been the night she vanished) and retrace her route in his car because he once read an article where a guy said there's a 20% chance we're living in a computer simulation and this "plan" will obviously cause a glitch in the Matrix wherein he will "see" what happened to Maura.

That is, I am not kidding, how his "investigation" begins.

Like he did with Amy he starts a blog about Maura and for awhile it becomes a magnet for tips, theories and discussion about Maura's disappearance. People are impressed with him. He's keeping Maura in the public eye. He's helping. Like I'm serious here, he is legitimately helping, I'm acknowledging that.

And then it all starts to go horribly wrong.

Renner's biggest problem is he can't bear not to be a part of the story he's supposed to be objectively reporting. He cannot bear the thought that he isn't part of the narrative. He has to make Amy and Maura about *him*.

The roller coaster starts to fall when no one actually connected with Maura wants anything to do with him. This can't possibly be because of his interview style (showing up unannounced at their homes and places of business and saying things like "maybe the police would like to know you wouldn't talk to an investigator

about Maura's disappearance" or his remarked upon tendency to come off as an obsessive asshole when he's questioning people). Clearly it's because they all have something to hiiiiiddde from this master of deductive reasoning and seer into the souls of the guilty.

We're treated to Renner's "reporting" on Fred, Maura's father, who was clearly carrying on a secret incestuous relationship with his daughter. Her sister Kathleen is a drug addict and an alcoholic who won't talk to him because of her brushes with the law. Her friends are all being warned off and threatened to stay away from Renner because obviously he's getting too close to the answers. Oh and Maura? She's a "sociopath."

And so a pattern emerges. If you don't want to talk to Renner you must have had something to do with Maura's disappearance or some other heinous (totally made up) crime which is clearly connected to Maura somehow. He defames so many of Maura's friends and relations based on nothing but his own insane theories and third and fourth party accounts from people who didn't even know Maura I don't know how this book even gets by being classified as non-fiction let alone "true crime."

Renner doesn't report. He makes up stories. Ridiculous, hurtful stories with not one spot of evidence to support them. He'd argue that of course. He'd argue that he has plenty of "proof" of the utter inanities he spouts as they occur to him. Proof like;

"Some guy on the internet told me."

Seriously that's his "proof." Some random person on the internet tells him that the crash as it's been recorded by the authorities couldn't possibly have happened the way they say it happened and suddenly the only answer is that clearly Maura was being followed by a second car that spirited her away to a new life in Canada.

Totally infallible right?

Chapter after chapter is devoted to similarly logical "theories" intermixed with Renner's own life which is going so far off the rails I'm surprised he's not sitting in either prison or a mental ward right now.

We're treated to lovely stories about his adventures abusing his four year old because they're all out of ideas of how to correct his behavior problems and the hours he spends self medicating his perfectly normal depression and anxiety with drugs and alcohol. Then there's the chapter where he assaults a police officer and goes to jail. Then he goes to visit his grandfather who sexually abused all the women in his family. He has what he calls frightening encounters with his various suspects where he more or less just like flies somewhere and tracks some poor person down just so he can "look them in the eye."

I think all of this is supposed to be amazingly insightful and like a window into his soul or something. I was supposed to marvel at his amazingly fucked up life and ponder how no one has ever had a more dysfunctional family or a more tragic childhood.

It's like he's yelling "See how similar it is to Maura and Amy? See!? Don't you see!?"

About halfway through this *thing* disguised as a true crime book Maura's family has had about enough of Fred being called an incestuous child molester and Maura herself being called a "sociopath" and an all around terrible person and makes a public statement on their Facebook page basically begging Renner to stop.

This hurts his feelings guys. It really, really does. Why don't they understand he's the only one who can save her!? Why!? What has he done that's so terrible?

But you know? Up until the very last pages of this book I was gonna give him a pass. Yes, he's a mediocre writer and an even worse investigator. By his own account he's a terrible father and a worse husband who has no business judging anyone else's drug, alcohol, or family problems. But up until those last few pages that's all he was. Just another asshole who wants his 15 minutes of fame.

Then he did something that I don't think any decent person can reasonably forgive. I'm going to quote it directly because I think anyone even considering reading this book should know what kind of man this guy really is. This comes from page 268 literally 2 pages from the epilogue. He's remarking (yet again) about how the family won't talk to him;

"But I am at a loss to explain their behavior. They do not want this book written. It is clear to me that they are no longer actively looking for Maura."

Let that sit a minute.

Because these poor people who have lost their daughter, their sister, their friend, this person they loved, this person they have to spend every day of their lives wondering if she's being tortured or raped or if she met some grisly end they'll never know about, because they don't want to talk to this parasite well that must mean they don't want to find her. They don't care and they're not looking anymore. Because they won't talk to this utter douchebag of a person.

I hope to god none of them read this book. I hope to god some day they find some kind of peace with the terrible tragedy that is surely part of every second of every day of their lives. But as long as people like Renner exist I have little hope they'll ever find anything like closure.

Renner compares himself to a lot of smarter, better people in this book. But I think the best comparison is one I know without a doubt he'd hate.

To me he most closely resembles poor old Willy Loman. Arthur Miller's tragic salesman who remembers better days that probably never were when he was a big deal and people knew his name and the mayor shook his hand! He's the guy who wakes up in the garage with a hose passed through the window of his car but can't remember how he got there.

And just like Mr. Loman attention must be paid. Attention must be paid and he does not care what he has to do to get it.

\*did a little editing on 3/19/18, no real changes to the content I swear.

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## **Kemper says**

*I received a free copy from the publisher for review.*

A reporter who had been fired for his refusal to kill a story about a politician's sex scandal goes into a strip club and during a lap dance he strikes up a conversation that helps reignite his passion for writing true crime

stories. So he decides to look into the disappearance of a college student that sends him down a self-destructive path as he copes with some ugly family history as well as fears about his own nature.

This sounds like the setup for a pretty good fiction thriller with a flawed protagonist becoming obsessed with a mystery to avoid dealing with his own problems, but it's one of those cases where the facts are probably stranger than any fiction a crime writer could dream up.

On February 9, 2004, nursing student Maura Murray vanished under puzzling circumstances after suddenly leaving the University of Massachusetts Amherst and driving over two hours north. She was last seen following a minor car accident on a rural road but refused help from a passing school bus driver who went to his nearby home and called the police. Even though only minutes passed from the time that Maura spoke to the bus driver until the first police officer arrived there was no sign of her.

In 2009 James Renner had just settled a lawsuit related to his wrongful termination as a newspaper reporter when he decided to dig into the disappearance of Maura. He'd find the family surprisingly uncooperative because usually the loved ones of missing people are anxious for publicity to keep the case in the public mind. With limited information and a belief that journalism today requires total transparency Renner decided to take an open approach to his research of posting information and updates on a blog, and this attracted a group of internet armchair detectives anxious to help who would provide information and tips related to the case. It also took a dark turn when someone began posting creepy YouTube clips that seem to be hinting towards knowledge of what happened to Maura as well as eventually making Renner's family the subject of unsettling videos.

This is one of those books that I find myself of two minds about. As a non-fiction tale of a writer getting unhealthily obsessed with a missing woman as a way of coping with and/or avoiding his own issues it's an extremely interesting page turner. It's also got an intriguing mystery at the heart of it because the more Renner digs into Maura Murray's life the more evident it becomes that this was a young woman with problems, and there's a lot of things to question and speculate about including the odd behavior of her father and her history of petty crime.

However, I always find myself extremely wary when the public gets interested in unsolved cases. It's really easy for cable news, schlock documentaries, and click-bait websites to exploit these. Even when a story is done well with a painstakingly researched and unbiased look at a case like the *Serial* podcast's first season it makes me uneasy because it seems to inspire the interwebs to unleash the worst kind of speculative nonsense without regard to facts or the realization that most crime is depressingly mundane and that it's almost never the result of a flashy serial killer or a conspiracy of some kind.

(I'm not immune to this either. I spent more time than I like to admit poring over the cell phone logs and tower maps posted on the *Serial* website coming up with my own theory. So I totally understand the allure of a true crime mystery. I just don't trust the average interwebs user's ability to solve one. That includes me.)

People are prone to indulging our inherent biases when we try to figure out what happened during some mysterious event, and we are remarkably stubborn about not letting facts get in the way of what we want to believe. We also like to turn anything unexplained into a larger story that follows our own internal sense of logic and will incorporate any random scrap of knowledge that seems to support a pet theory. All of these things tend to combine to turn any case that catches the public eye into a clusterfuck of any wild theories the human mind can concoct, and it seems like the result is often a murky swamp of rumors, half-truths, misunderstandings, and outright lies that make it nigh on impossible to separate fact from fiction. If you send a bunch of hounds into the woods baying after a fox it's impossible to track the fox later because its paw

prints will have been obliterated by the dogs.

I'm not saying that Renner exploited Maura's disappearance or was irresponsible in his reporting here. He's got a variety of reasons for becoming obsessed with the case, and as he points out he probably would have made more money by simply writing another novel. For the most part he does do what seems to be a reliable job of research, discounting crackpot notions, and sticking to the facts. However, he also isn't above thinking that coincidences are the universe's way of telling you something, visiting a psychic, tossing in the idea that the world as we know it is really just a computer simulation, and describing a couple of weird incidents that make his son sound like a character in a Stephen King novel.

At the end of the day Renner has got his own theory about what happened to Maura. His idea isn't outlandish and there is evidence to support it, but I do question if he didn't fall into the rabbit hole of looking for a reason Maura disappeared when the answer might be a lot more meaningless and random than what he believes. I suspect that if ever do learn of Maura's fate that the answer will turn out to be surprisingly simple.

While this digging into an on-going mystery hit on some personal pet peeves of mine with the true crime genre, I still found Renner's story and writing compelling overall. He also seems like a decent guy who was struggling with a lot, and the book made me hope that things got better for him after he wrote it. Maura Murray's story almost certainly doesn't have a happy ending, but there's still hope for James Renner.

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## **Diane says**

### **This book is such a good read!**

*True Crime Addict* blends several of my favorite things: gonzo journalism, a real-life mystery, and it's all mixed up with some personal drama. The whole story is bonkers, and I gobbled it up in two days.

James Renner is a writer and reporter who became obsessed with the disappearance of Maura Murray. Maura was a 21-year-old nursing student who went missing in February 2004 after crashing her car in New Hampshire. What actually happened that night? What was she doing there? Where was she headed? Who was helping her? What was the deal with her boyfriend? Why did her father act so weird?

Renner sets out to try and answer those questions. He tracks down witnesses and old friends of Maura, he tries to talk to her family (some of them refused), and he tries to recreate the events of the night she disappeared. He comes up with several theories of what happened, but if you're new to the case, I won't spoil anything here.

Meanwhile, Renner is dealing with his own personal mess, including losing his newspaper job because he mouthed off to his publisher for refusing to print a political story, losing his temper and getting arrested when he felt his family was being stalked, dealing with his child's special needs and abilities, etc., etc. It's fascinating stuff.

There's a lot more in this book, but I'll let you discover it. *True Crime Addict* was so engrossing that once I finished it, I wished I could have read it again for the first time. Highly recommended!

### **Favorite Quotes**

"The first thing you learn as a reporter is that nothing you read in the newspaper is true."

"We forget how dangerous nature can be. We want to forget, I think. We don't want to be reminded that nature is more deadly than man. Man can be cruel, but nature is indifferent. It is the unrivaled psychopath."

"Some families are magnets for tragedy. It's been my experience the those who have suffered the most are usually the first ones to suffer again."

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## **karen says**

i interview james renner here:

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/t...>

in the opening pages of this book, the recently fired, mildly disgraced investigative journalist james renner goes to a gentleman's club where he manages to derail a perfectly good lapdance into a quiet reflective conversation with his stripper, whose sister's killer was about to go to trial for her murder.

that is what a true crime addict looks like - someone for whom boobies are not always the most interesting thing in the room.

throughout the course of this book, james renner will investigate crime, get himself incarcerated, be verbally and physically abused, follow false leads, learn that he scored "very similar to" ted bundy on his psychopathy test, spend the night in a room full of teddy bears, find a chilling surprise in a dirty magazine, drink and drive to put himself in the shoes of a missing woman, get into cars with strangers, take the advice of a psychic, explore his own family's legacy of violence, be internet-stalked and threatened by a creepy dude making targeted videos straight out of a low-budget slasher film, witness his autistic son predict the future with chilling accuracy, discover a modern-day underground railroad, and casually, but earnestly, drop in some theoretical physics bombshell about how there's a fairly good chance that the entire universe as we experience it is just a computer simulation in which it's possible to trigger glitches in reality.

this is not your typical true crime story.

this is a true crime story by james renner, whose fiction has never felt the need to confine itself to any single genre or any reader's expectation so there's no reason to have anticipated anything different from his nonfiction. however, this approach is much more difficult to adapt into nonfiction, even narrative nonfiction, without the story seeming scattered or lumpy or purposeless.

this book, whose focus is on the mysterious 2004 disappearance of maura murray, is not lumpy.

the recent popularity of nonbook sensations like *Serial*, *The Jinx*, *Making a Murderer*, and *The People v. O.J. Simpson* have helped to elevate the true crime genre out of its literary gutter, long sneered-at as being the pap of supermarket checkout lines - those garish and jaggedy-fonted mass markets in which violent crimes, usually against women, are exploited for some ghoulish *frisson* with no merit but shock value.

because while, yes - that is a large part of the true crime market, there are nobler and more meaningful reasons to examine the realities of a world, computer simulation or not, in which violent things happen: to explore causation, study historical context, identify cultural or socioeconomic factors of crime, predict patterns, dissect psychology - to figure out why these things happen, if they can be avoided, and what all of it

says about us as a species.

but this book isn't quite *that*, either. it's somewhere in the middle. it's neither sensationalistic nor academic in its treatment and it lives in this space where memoir and true crime and metaphysics spin into a story of absence and obsession and the impossibility of inherent truth while acknowledging the eeriness of coincidences, recurrences, or as renner borrows the term: *fearful symmetry*.

this is, instead, a story of a man, suddenly rudderless, obsessed with finding the why and how of a woman's disappearance, and what the search for these answers did to him: *Without the rigid structure of newspaper reporting, I was becoming increasingly manic. The only thing keeping me sane, really, was the mystery of Maura Murray's disappearance.*

renner has the dogged spirit of a journalist with a novelist's flair for the dramatic, which brings a perfect balance to this kind of writing. he's a storyteller, with a tone chatty enough to draw the reader in, but his professional background allows for a more authoritative perspective than many - he knows the tricks of the trades of both the media and the police, he has contacts that can lend their expertise to special skill sets like statement analysis, he's familiar with procedure, jargon and shorthand; what it means when something is *not* being said, he can identify the anomalies in this case and extrapolate from that. and there are a lot of anomalies in this case, niggling discrepancies, outright contradictions, red herrings.

he also, with his bundy-grade sociopathy, has the kind of tenacious mind that not only sees anomalies, but must understand them and what they signify. he's obsessive, he won't back down, he's a little self-destructive, and isn't shy about crossing the line from investigation to invasion when he comes up against the reluctance or flat-out animosity of friends and family members who absolutely do not want him writing this book. as his psychologist tells him, claiming that true crime writing may benefit him: *"Your mind works like the people you chase after. Like a good detective. You're a sociopath, too."*

and he just goes balls to the wall, not only picking apart the case, but bringing so much more to the table in his asides and tangents, locating the echoes and odd synchronicities in the bigger picture: the violent history of early new england, the genocide of the abenaki (who believe *our universe is a dream and that words have souls*), the BTK killer, ariel castro, as well as those found within his personal sphere: a violent grandfather, his own near-abduction as a child, the stalking of his sister, the emerging violent tendencies in his son and his attempts to manage his own rage with prescription drugs and alcohol.

*I knew him for what he was: a crazy man only pretending to be dangerous. And he had no idea who I really was: a dangerous man working really hard not to be crazy.*

it's a messy case, but fascinating. during the course of his investigation, he will hear a wide and varied range of theories and suspects from his sources, each plausible to a degree, and maura murray's squeaky-clean and sympathetic façade will chip away to reveal the laura plamer-caliber mass of secrets underneath.

moral of the story - don't go missing, because that's the end of your privacy.

by the end you have a pretty convincing picture of what went down, but as he says right from the beginning: *The first thing you learn as a reporter is that nothing you read in the newspaper is true...Every article you've ever read is a little untrue. I guarantee it.*

or, more universally:

*There's no real closure. This is an existential world, my friend.*

i know i have grumbled before about authors of nonfiction who insert themselves too much into the story (\*koff\* *The Mole People: Life in the Tunnels Beneath New York City*\*koff\*), but in this case, it feels more natural. a privileged white girl interviewing homeless people living underground, who have established a complicated society with its own rules and hierarchies and history - it's clear which of the two perspectives is the more interesting.

but here, with a case in which so much is unclear, the story of the frustrations of the investigative process and the strain of a distraction becoming an obsession; of what the helplessness of not-knowing does to a man, a marriage, a family, a mind - that story must hold as much appeal to a reader as the story of a woman who disappeared.

the only reason i gave this four instead of five stars is because full disclosure: i got to hang out with james renner before i read this, and when he was describing to book to me, the angle that most interested me was this idea of tracing a line from his grandfather's violent crimes, his own experience of abuse, the propensity for violence within himself, modulated with medication, the manifestations of violent tendencies in his son, the discomfort of studying violent men while worrying about his son *becoming* a violent man, and the fears of having another child: *I didn't know what I was more afraid of: that it would be another boy, or that it would be a girl brought into a world full of dangerous men.* i wish there had been more of that, because i think this immersion into the study of violence can have a desensitizing effect until it becomes personalized, and i could have read so much more about his own experiences navigating this psychological minefield.\*

and i could have read an entire book about his son's spooky talents.

okay, there are two reasons for the four stars - also because i don't want my integrity questioned. these are my true and honest opinions of this book, and even though james renner did buy me a plate of berries, i cannot be bought by a plate of berries.

let's call it a 4.5 - they were very good berries.

\* this is not a true spoiler; it just doesn't really fit up there, but i wanted to include it as an example illustrating what i'm talking about in terms of parallels and the personal :

(view spoiler)

which ties in later to an episode with his son, who has already declared "pain is funny,"

Time-outs didn't work anymore. There was nothing left. So we went back to spanking.

I should have known how he'd react; it's what I did, after all. When I spanked Casey, he found that calm place I had discovered. That calmness on the other side of rage. I would spank him and then he'd smile. He'd fucking smile at me and say, "That didn't hurt," like he was a young Giles Corey.



THIS is what i'm drawn to the most, in this book - it reads like fiction, but it's not and it gives me chills.  
(hide spoiler)]

come to my blog!

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## **Delee says**

[image error]

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## **Dan Schwent says**

True crime writer James Renner researches the disappearance of Maura Murray as his personal life goes up in flames.

**I got ARCs of this from Netgalley and from Random House.**

On the heels of reading *The Man from Primrose Lane*, I just had to read more James Renner. When two opportunities to read this fell into my lap, I had to take advantage.

Maura Murray went missing after wrecking her car one snowy night. She was never seen again. True crime writer James Renner picked up the scent and dug into Maura's past while embarking on an unintentional journey of self-discover, finding himself in jail, dealing with substance abuse issues, and discovering he may, in fact, be as damaged as the guys he's chasing.

*True Crime Addict* is written in a style very much resembling the crime fiction I've come to know and love, making for one gripping read. I read most of the book in one sitting, neglecting both household chores and my girlfriend until I was finished. The ending irked me a little until I remembered I wasn't reading fiction. I was cool with it after that.

The case were very serpentine, as real life usually is. Again, I forgot I wasn't reading fiction for most of the book. As I said, the style was very engaging, the opposite of the other true crime book I've read, *The Monster of Florence*.

I really want to gush over all the details of the book but it's best if you go into it unspoiled. It was one phenomenal read. James Renner is my new George Pelecanos in that I will now track down and devour his books one by one until there is a James Renner-shaped void in my life. Five out of five stars.

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## **Trudi says**

I came to know author James Renner through his wacky, engrossing, bewitchingly unique novels - *The Man from Primrose Lane* and *The Great Forgetting*. And while he has a noteworthy talent spinning wild and crazy tales of speculative fiction, Renner is also a dedicated true crime writer. In fact, the journalism and true crime writing came first. And now he's returned to these stomping grounds in a big way with his new release *True*

What sets this true crime book apart from most is not only the exceptionally sharp, punchy, lucid writing, but that Renner very much writes himself into the story as an observer, participant and one could even argue collateral damage to the unsolved Maura Murray missing person case. We realize almost from the opening paragraphs, that this is going to be a very personal journey for Renner, where he not only loses himself down the addicting, obsessive rabbit hole of trying to solve the mystery of a young woman's inexplicable disappearance into seemingly thin air, he also lays bare his own personal demons, that include his young son's struggle with uncontrollable violent outbursts (and quite possibly prescient abilities). This book really is one man's unflinching look into the abyss, and what stares back at him.

Renner is not the only person to have fallen down the rabbit hole of the Maura Murray case (a quick Google search will prove that), but given his personality and dark obsessive tendencies that he comes by quite honestly, Renner is arguably the one who's fallen the hardest and most completely. The publication of this book is the culmination (and hopefully for him) an emotional catharsis of a very long journey that Renner has recorded in detail on his Maura Murray blog that he launched in June 2011.

This book really could not have come at a better time. We seem to be in the midst of a true crime renaissance with recent cultural watershed phenomena like *Making a Murderer*, *The Jinx* and the first season of Sarah Koenig's podcast *Serial* which I became obsessed with when it ran in the fall of 2014. And you might as well throw *The People vs OJ* on that pile too, because it was also fantastic and drew a huge viewing audience.

I want to thank Karen for putting a copy of this book in my hands and it is with great enthusiasm I write this review in the hopes it brings even more much deserved attention to what Renner has accomplished here.

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## **abby says**

James Renner is a creep. This is a man who posts pictures of random women on his blog, plucked from social media and other sources, and encourages his internet troll army to speculate whether or not they are "really" Maura Murray. This is a man who has called Maura Murray a sociopath, a baseless accusation that in no way suggests Renner cares about the subject of his obsession. This is a guy who drove drunk to simulate Murray's possibly inebriated drive through New Hampshire. He could have killed someone. This is a guy who punches a cop and thinks he's the victim. According to a personality test, he tested as "similar to Ted Bundy." Hmmm.

Despite assuming a position of authority and asserting himself to be an important part of the investigation, Renner has no real press credentials. He's on the outside of this investigation, looking in, demanding answers he's not entitled to and making it up as he goes along.

A large portion of this book focuses on Renner himself-- his serial rapist grandfather, his almost-abduction as a child, his inner demons. I have to say, it's not a boring story. And it's honest. That's more than I can say about the portions about the Murray investigation. Those are less honest. There he relies on inane details fed to him from internet sleuths that he then sensationalizes and puffs up. He treats rumor and innuendo as fact.

Renner stalks Murray's family and friends, and when they won't talk to him he decides it's because they are hiding secrets-- secrets he makes up in his head. Renner hints that Maura's father won't talk to him because he's hiding sexual abuse. There's no evidence of that, at all. A friend won't talk to him because she's hiding

that she helped Murray escape. There's no evidence of that, at all. Families of the missing are NOT public property. They don't have to answer questions from every Tom and Harry just because. They have no obligation to satisfy curiosities or entertain conspiracy theories. No one owes Renner an interview no matter how badly he wants one. The Murray family clearly does not believe talking to him will help find Maura. They are entitled to make that determination, and I don't disagree with it.

Renner speculates that Maura may have been pregnant. There was birth control pills found in her car at the time of her disappearance, a detail that's pushed aside in favor of veiled hints. Renner isn't shy of portraying Murray as a promiscuous woman with lots of secret men in the shadows. He insists Murray was followed to New Hampshire by a tandem driver. No one saw the headlights or saw the car or heard the car. His theory is that the driver "doubled back" once Murray crashed, very possibly drunk (wine spilled all over the car) and ushered her off to her new life in Canada. It doesn't make a lot of logical sense. If the second car had seen Maura crash, it would have been seen by the eyewitnesses. If it was too far ahead to see the crash, Maura would have needed to contact the driver-- but there is no cell service in that area. Plus, she left her car full of her possessions, things she must have felt were important enough to take to her new life. I'm not saying it's impossible, but it's unlikely enough that a "journalist" like Renner should have the sense not to treat it as fact.

Maura Murray was not a perfect person. She was, however, by all accounts, a nice girl with flaws. She was in her early 20s and had her whole life ahead of her. Who knows what she could have achieved. James Renner has turned her disappearance into a cottage industry and is banking on it, big time. And goodness knows a tabloid-style story sells. I just feel sorry for the people caught up in the tidal wave of Renner's ego.

Please don't read this book.

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## **Chelsea Humphrey says**

Thank you Netgalley for my copy in exchange for a fair and honest review.

It must be the month for true crime for me, because the last few I've read have been outstanding!!! I honestly had never heard of James Renner until I saw a review by Karen Brissette (sp? Please don't hate me!), but his stuff looked interesting and figured I'd eventually read something of his. When I saw this available I requested immediately and was giddy when I saw I was approved. If you like true crime, this book is for you. I can't recommend it highly enough! It reads like a fictional thriller with his ease of reliability and humorous wit thrown in. I kept thinking "Geez, I could be friends with this dude". There is no robotic, cold, factual feeling to this read AT ALL.

I really don't want to touch on the plot as that's the whole point of reading this one, but I will say that from the other reviews I have read, we have all varied in our conclusions of what we think truly happened to Maura Murray. I think I most agree with this review below (which is excellent and extremely well written): <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

I also enjoyed the personal aspect of this book; the author does a fantastic job of showing his raw vulnerability on his career as an investigative journalist and what these types of cases can do to a person. This was just another layer of the onion of connection I felt with him. (Weirdest analogy ever???)

Go request this book! Pre-order it! Read it! Love it like I did!

