



Two Trains Running

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In his most original and compelling book yet, Andrew Vachss presents an electrifying tale of corruption in a devastated mill town. It is 1959--a moment in history when the clandestine, powerful forces that will shape America to the present day are about to collide. Walker Dett is a hired gun, known for using the most extreme measures to accomplish his missions. Royal Beaumont is the "hillbilly boss" who turned Locke City from a dying town into a thriving vice capital. But organized crime outsiders are moving in on Beaumont's turf, so he reaches out for Dett in a high-risk move to maintain his power at all costs. Add a rival Irish political machine, a deeply entrenched neo-Nazi "party", the nascent black power movement, turf-disputing juvenile gangs, a muck-raking journalist who doubles as a blackmailer, the FBI--a covert observer and occasional participant which may itself be under surveillance-- and Locke City is about as stable as a nitroglycerin truck stalled on the railroad tracks.

Two Trains Running Details

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From Reader Review Two Trains Running for online ebook

Jacob says

I read this one ten years ago when it was originally released but surprisingly it didn't stay with me very well. That's to my benefit though as rereading it was great. It starts a little slowly and is very over descriptive at the start, but soon you find yourself hurtling down the tracks full speed ahead. This book has several irons in the fire and weaves them together well with the only regret being there hasn't been a sequel yet.

Andrea says

It took me forever to slog through this. Parts of it were good but mostly it was just a chore to read. My least favorite Vachss book.

Alan Mills says

A "one off" by Vachss (not part of a series...although it surely could be). Set in a small town in an unidentified state (but apparently a border state--my guess is southern Ohio/Pennsylvania or Northern Kentucky--although it could equally be Cairo, Illinois) in 1959. The local politics, gambling, sex trade, and most everything else is controlled by a local gang, which is being pressured by the Italians and the Irish. The local powers bring in a contract killer, which--as it always does--sets all kinds of things in motion.

If that was all, Vachss would have the bones for a good book. But he ups the ante significantly by including two factors central to US history in 1959: race and Kennedy's run for President. The town is clearly a Border State with a significant Black population...a population which is on the verge of joining the national civil rights movement, with all of the attendant destabilization that entailed. The national election, with vague hints at Kennedy's mob ties, and not at all vague hints at Hoover's corrupt operation of the FBI, also plays a big role, as outside forces all converge on this sleepy small town. Emmett Till makes a cameo, BTW.

As usual, Vachss makes it all work, giving each of the main characters enough back story to make them there dimensional, but not so much to interrupt the narrative flow (if you think that is an easy balance to strike, try writing five page which include both action and a character description. Trust me, it is really hard, and Vachss is a master at it.

As I said, this could be a series, as the outside contract killer is clearly a fascinating person. However, Vachss tells his entire story here, so that kinda lets out the usual series technique of slowly rolling out your main characters back story. So, I guess this one really is a one off.

Nancy says

I'll always read whatever Mr. Vachss writes, but his more recent books make me miss the older ones, which had more heart. Two Trains is all plot, with two many characters spread too thinly. I didn't get nearly enough

of the protagonist. Still, I like his voice, and his message and mission are consistent.

Don Crouch says

You aren't ready for this. No, really. No one is ready for the amazing turn Andrew Vachss has taken his writing life. And that, of course, is the best part. *Two Trains Running* is a book that astonishes the reader on many levels.

Known, of course, for the durable Burke series, Vachss here takes his loyal readers down a completely different track. For those just getting on board, the welcome is there for the reading, as this is a totally new creation from Vachss. A historical noir--told in a voice steeped in the knowledge of years, and hardened by them.

Two Trains Running is two weeks in the life of Locke City, somewhere in the non-coastal American Heartland, fall of 1959. A once-prosperous place, brought low by depression, revived in well-protected vice. That vice is ruled by Royal Beaumont, native crime boss. With Italians and Irish trying to muscle their way in to his world, he brings in the enigmatic Walker Dett to sharpen his edge. Mix in various law enforcement agencies with various motives, and a brewing race war. As struggles over, variously, ways of life, love, salvation, and the future of the country erupt, Vachss blends and boils the threads of his story without sentiment, and with clear intent. The result is a work both breath-taking in its action and startling in its heart and soul. The stories you are told, in many cases, are the ones you had no idea you were reading until they were over. There are a couple of those here, too.

Vachss tells the story with no chapters, *per se*, but in a percussive time-stamping style, that does a couple of things; helps give the various plot-lines a propulsion that is cinematic; It also re-enforces the observational nature of the narration. It's written as a sort of omniscient surveillance of events sans comment. That part is our job. Vachss wants us to look at these events filtered only by our own experience and knowledge, and to see how the pieces fit into the country we think we live in. And by doing so, decide their truth.

According to some early press, part of Vachss' intent was to create a tribute to investigative journalism as a last line in a democracy's defense (no currency there, eh?). He does that not so much in the way he presents Jimmy Procter, Locke City's hotshot reporter, but in the way he tells the story itself. It's a style refined in reportage, betraying no point of view. Just the facts. Third person, and then some.

Walker Dett is a ronin of his times, a soldier without an army, on a path that transcends anything in it. One of *Two Trains Running*'s victories is how his journey provides moments of such extreme dark and light. For every demonstration of his violent gift, there is, upon his introduction to one Tussy Chambers, a stage of a soul opening, that provides the essential counter-balance to the entire story. There are numerous love stories amidst the darkness here, and they all serve to feed the passions at work.

So let's talk about Tussy for a minute, ok? Burke readers, let's just say she's right in there with Blue Belle and Ann O.Dyne as classic Vachss Gals. She is love, faith and temptation. She is irresistible. And of course, the force of her personality becomes a major part of the story Vachss is telling. While we're talking about the "fun stuff", let's mention that Vachss' love affair with the American Automobile is in full fettle here, and adds a precise authenticity to the action.

Vachss has fueled *Two Trains Running* with some first-rate characters; from the afore-mentioned Royal

Beaumont Mountain Man Crime Boss (think Burl Ives in Nick Ray's swamp-noir, "Wind Across The Everglades), to Sherman Layne, the only honest cop in the entire story, who is in love with the town madam.

Vachss nods to other themes familiar in his canon....that families are made not born, forged by action and trust, not blood. That crime is often in the intent, not the deed. Part of the joy to regular readers of his work is seeing how those themes get worked in to his story. It's one of the things that make Andrew Vachss a singular writer in this genre. And it's just a small part of what makes Two Trains Running a singular reading experience.

Maddy says

RATING: 3.25

PROTAGONIST: Walker Dett

OCCUPATION: Assassin

SETTING: 1959 Locke City (fictional town in the midwest US)

Locke City is located in the central United States and has been run for decades by Royal Beaumont and his minions. It's the kind of place that becomes a destination if you're interested in gambling or other vices, with the appeal being that you won't be cheated or harassed. A place like that is bound to attract others who want to have the power and rewards of Locke City has to offer. Sal Dioguardi is a Mafia boss who's begun to demand rent on the jukeboxes around town. There's an Irishman by the name of Mickey Shalare who seems to be putting his oar in the water. Royal is an astute and observant man; he hires on an assassin by the name of Walker Dett to help him keep things in line.

Dett makes sure that Dioguardi gets the message by eliminating some of his subordinates. But the truth of the matter is that Locke City in 1959 is a place that is roiling beneath the surface. Even if Dioguardi leaves, it's likely that there will be some other mob man to replace him. At the same time, Shalare wants to work a deal with Beaumont to swing the vote in the upcoming presidential election from Nixon to an Irish Catholic. And there are other disturbing forces at work as well, with white gangs vying for territorial rights and black residents vying for civil rights.

Vachss succeeds at playing out all of these narrative threads and interconnections skillfully. However, I found that various elements of his writing style made the book less than riveting for me. First of all, Vachss focuses on Dett's relationship with a waitress named Tussy Chambers who he meets in Locke City and who he credits with being a "pure" person to whom he can reveal his true self. Far too much time was spent on this relationship angle; it would have been much more suspenseful to focus on Dett doing the job he was hired to do than watching him act like a lovesick schoolboy. And his revelation to Tussy of what has been driving him was alternately moving and hokey.

Secondly, Vachss has an irritating habit when writing dialogue of filling conversations with incomplete sentences, the person listening to whoever is speaking breaking in on their thoughts mid-stream. It wasn't just one character who did that, but a characteristic of the dialogue in general. I began to long for a conversation where both people could speak their thoughts in full! Given Vachss' wide catalog of successful books, I expected to find some excellent prose in action; instead, much of it was insipid or downright mushy. "Ruth whispered words no customer could ever have paid her to say. Then shuddered to an orgasm she didn't believe could exist. Sherman followed right after her, as they mated for life."

Vachss did an excellent job of portraying the warring forces at work in Locke City, the confrontations between the outsiders and the insiders, as well as the introduction of conflict that existed across America at that time. At times, he moved into lecture mode on some of these themes; I felt the book could have benefited from some judicious editing, as there were some long digressions that didn't really move the plot forward. Likewise, there was a huge cast of characters; it was hard to keep them straight after a while.

I credit Vachss for an ambitious undertaking that didn't quite work for me.

Maria Magdalena says

I don't know why I read this book, other than it came in a bundle of NY Times Best seller list... I don't know why I persevered in reading this book, the subject matter did not interest me. The list of characters is so long that half way through the story I totally did not know who belonged to which 'gang' or what the hell was happening.

Kiera Healy says

I admit that I am slow to review this - I've been neglecting my Goodreads lately. Two months after I finished Two Trains Running, I had to skim it a bit to jog my memory; it didn't leave much of an impression. It's a noirish number with an enormous cast of characters - different gangs, criminals, politicians, etc, etc - and it's all spread rather too thin and difficult to follow. I didn't care for the protagonist, and the plot is so complicated that the characters spend most of their time reminding each other what's happening: "As you know, being my brother, we were raised by our grandparents until Grandma died in that waterskiing accident" etc etc.

In fact, two months on, the only thing I remember clearly from this novel is this line from a sex scene, which I may well be able to quote verbatim until the day I die, such is its horrific power:

"Sherman entered Ruth as gently as a man defusing a bomb."

For once, I am speechless.

Todd says

Normally, I would recommend an Andrew Vachss novel to anyone who enjoys Hammett, Chandler, Woolrich or anyone other author of crime fiction. Vachss is the most fast-paced, gritty and violent writer of crime fiction I've read in the past few years (but I haven't read all that many others either).

In Two Trains Running, however, he not only slows down his usual pace to a crawl, he deconstructs his usual anti-hero into a lame, tongue-tied avatar of his own fate, Walker Dett, capable of only being decisive

and cunning only in regard to killing. He is so adept at his violent work and such a bumbling failure in the other portions of his life, he becomes unlikable and false by the end of the novel.

That hardly matters, because Dett isn't involved with much of the plot. Instead, there are two rival gangs of local hillbillies and Italians, led by Royal Beaumont and Sal Dioguardi, respectively. The Italians are trying to wrest power of a small vice town from Beaumont, who basically started the city's main industry when the mills closed down. Beaumont calls in Dett, an outsider, to set a chain of events in motion to free his organization from the mafia for the foreseeable future. Dett does his part by the conclusion, but for the most part, he's busy wooing a local waitress in a subplot that is more interesting and better done than the main story. Alongside the two main gangs are a myriad of FBI agents, hotel employees, teenage gangs, a whorehouse madame, a clean cop, a dirty reporter, the Klan, a black power faction, and Irish gangsters, most of whom appear so infrequently, it's impossible to tell many of them apart by the conclusion.

The book is written as the events unfold, with dates and times substituting for chapters. While occasionally, these slices of time provide crucial events, mostly they contain boring snippets of conversation, usually consisting of an frequently unnamed character explaining the events of the novel to his idiot partner/subordinate/girlfriend/etc. Often, two or three things will be happening at the same time, so Vachss jumps between different events as they happen, so instead of one boring scene, you get three or four. By the end of the book, I just wanted something--anything--to actually happen without a two-page exposition between Smarty and Dumbguy. When I did get to the end, it was a colossal letdown, as if Vachss himself had grown weary of men and women he didn't bother turning into fleshed-out characters as well, and just told himself to wrap it up.

I strongly recommend Andrew Vachss to anyone looking for a modern noir-type crime story, just stay away from this one. Try *The Getaway Man*, *Shella*, or *Flood* (to get an introduction to Vachss's recurring anti-hero, Burke).

Mike Kazmierczak says

Vachss proves once again that he is great at writing a good old-fashioned, crime noir story. However while I did enjoy the book, there were still some flaws and issues that I had which took away from the overall novel.

The story, based in late 1959, involves Royal Beaumont, a self-professed hillbilly, who rules the town of Locke City with an iron fist. When the mafia start trying to muscle in on his business, Beaumont hires an outside enforcer who turns out to also be a great strategist. Throw into the mix some racial discord along with an Irish mob and corrupt FBI agents and you'll have all the pieces.

The problem was that the final picture included a little too much. The social and business interactions of the various groups were already a bit stretched. Then when Vachss threw in a bunch of political positioning too, it became too much and things didn't seem to gel together. Motives of the different groups were never clear. I don't think they were too complex for me to understand; I never saw them as being clear. And then to make matters worse, too many of the characters all read the same. At least four characters could be described as criminals with a strong moral or sense of honor. The source of their morals differed (racial pride or tortured soul being the two major ones) but their dialogue was interchangeable. It made the story difficult and not ring out as true. All in all, Vachss has done a much better job.

Peter says

Vachss receives high praise from Martha Grimes, whose mysteries I like. His book is not easy to follow with a big reveal at the end and small revelations along the way. It's supposed to paint a realistic picture of life in America at the end of the 1950s, but a certain kind of realism--where everyone's got a racket and where violence is the great equalizer. Vachss has been prolific. I'm not certain whether the main character in this novel is part of a series or not. I suspect it is.

Theodore Kinni says

If you're into descriptions of cars and clothes from the 50's, I guess it's worth a read. Otherwise, probably not.

Rick Folker says

suspenseful, fast-paced, and a fun read

Tom Britz says

Two Trains Running, my first Andrew Vachss read, is a hard one to wrap my head around. It's a novel based in Loche City, a medium to large city somewhere in the midwest. The year is 1959 and the town is gearing up for an inner war, with the likes of organised crime, street gangs, both white and black who are warring amongst themselves, a group of the KKK and even an Aryan Nation neo nazi group.

Royal Beaumont the home grown crime boss who has held power for a long time is beginning to feel the encroaching hands of the mafia starting to nibble away at his holdings. Royal calls in the main character, Walker Dett to help him and that is the spark that ignites the sleeping bomb.

The characters were handled well and the storyline was a good one, but to me the way the novel was laid out in small vignettes with timelines and what seemed to be an endless supply of characters did slightly drag this novel down a bit.

Deborah Katz says

It's cheesy noir.

But in a good way. It's cheesy noir for people who would otherwise throw cheesy noir across the room.

It's a beach read if you're reading on the beach when it's cloudy and sort of cold and damp out.

It's the thinking man's noir when he doesn't want to think too hard...just wants to fall into a genre but not feel

stupid about it. I mean, would the thinking man read fucking Scott Turow?

It's Sol Yurick if Sol Yurick were more retro than PoMo.
