



# Lullaby Town

*Robert Crais*

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## **Lullaby Town** Robert Crais

Peter Alan Nelsen is a super-successful movie director who is used to getting what he wants. And what he wants is to find the wife and infant child he dumped on the road to fame.

It's the kind of case that Cole could handle in his sleep, except that when Cole actually finds Nelsen's ex-wife, everything takes on nightmarish proportions - a nightmare which involves Cole with a nasty New York mob family and a psychokiller who is the son of the godfather. When the unpredictable Nelsen charges in, an explosive situation blows sky-high.

## **Lullaby Town Details**

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## From Reader Review Lullaby Town for online ebook

### Col says

Synopsis/blurb.....

Peter Alan Nelsen is a super successful movie director who is used to getting what he wants. And what he wants is to find the wife and infant child he dumped on the road to fame. It's the kind of case that Cole could handle in his sleep, except that when Cole actually finds Nelsen's ex wife, everything takes on nightmarish proportions a nightmare which involves Cole with a nasty New York mob family and a psychokiller who is the son of the godfather. When the unpredictable Nelsen charges in, an explosive situation blows sky high. This is the 3rd Elvis Cole book in the series. I read or possibly re-read the first 2 last month, memory being not quite what it used to be. The laid-back LA private investigator and his erstwhile side-kick Joe Pike team up again when hired to track down a Hollywood hotshot's long divorced wife and son.

Cole achieves this fairly effortlessly, but when threatened and beaten after confronting the ex-wife, digs deeper. Kathy, the ex and now a successful businesswoman and bank manager is being coerced by the mob to launder cash through her bank. Cole, always a sympathetic ear for a damsel in distress holds off from reporting back to his employer, endeavouring to try and extricate Kathy from Charlie DeLuca clutches first. The problem is DeLuca instead of being a reasonable businessman, albeit operating outside the law is also the psychopathic son of a crime lord.

Cole's efforts at negotiation prove ultimately fruitless and the saga unfolds with an ever-increasing number of criminal lowlifes, minor plot off-shoots and escalating violence.

At about 230 pages long, and without taxing my brain too much, Lullaby Town was a quick, fast-paced enjoyable read. I'll be trying to locate the 4th instalment buried somewhere in the depths of my disorganised attic library – Free Fall – to read next month.

4 from 5

Bought new probably 20-odd years ago (originally published in 1992) from who knows where.

<http://col2910.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03...>

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### Dan Schwent says

A Hollywood director hires Elvis Cole to track down a wife and son he abandoned a decade earlier. Cole tracks down the ex-wife and quickly finds out that she's under the thumb of the mob. Can Cole save her and re-unite her with her former husband?

Elvis Cole sure got in over his head in this one. Crazy mobsters, secret deals between crime families, and a Hollywood director that is a colossal asshole make for a great story. As always, Crais let the tension build until a great firefight at the end.

Karen Lloyd, the ex-wife, was far more than a damsel in distress and my favorite member of the supporting cast. Peter Alan Nelson was a douche bag of epic proportions and I have to think Crais drew from his own Hollywood experiences when creating him. The ever-changing dynamic between Karen, Peter, and their son Toby was one of the more memorable parts of the novel. Crais gave us more of a look into the psyche of Elvis Cole, as well as a tiny glimpse behind Joe Pike's sunglasses.

The more Robert Crais books I read, the more convinced I am that he is the real deal. With this volume, any

thoughts of Elvis Cole being a Spenser ripoff have vanished. Lullaby Town would be a worthy addition to any crime/mystery fan's book shelf.

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### **Nate says**

Okay, THIS is more like it! The setting, plot, writing and characters all seemed to finally gel for me with this series and I had a blast with this one. Elvis only gets more and more likable and Pike only gets more and more badass. A quick aside about Pike, I really don't get the hate he gets sometimes. The character's whole charm is that you don't ever know what's going on in the dude's head other than he's Cole's buddy to the death and will put a motherfucker on ice with the greatest of ease. What else do you need? Angst? That would only ruin the fun of these books. I did find it funny that even Cole has no idea as to how Pike can see in the dark with his ever-present sunglasses on. Onward to more Cole/Pike goodness with *Free Fall*!

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### **Tom says**

Elvis Cole dealing with old school wiseguys, a movie director who is a spoiled brat, and the director's long-gone runaway ex-girlfriend.

Joe Pike, as ever, is a class act

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### **Ray Smith says**

*Lullaby Town* is not a bad book. But it's not a particularly good book either. Nor is it memorable. What it is, is predictable and formulaic.

In its defense, the story is well written, and the last few chapters were riveting. But that's like saying that a team scored two goals late in the match, when they were down four-nil in the seventieth minute. A valiant effort late, but they still lost.

All the major characters were cookie-cutters and had little depth or definition. Hard-boiled private eye who served in Vietnam? Check. His partner, former special forces? Check. Movie executive who doesn't think about anyone but himself? Check. Single mother? Check. Mafia of various types? Check.

The main plot starts with the aforementioned movie exec who was married, had a son, got divorced, and never gave his family a second thought until ten years later when he suddenly wants to be the boy's father. The why is never really explored. The other main plot is that his ex-wife has a new life, a new name, and is involved in a money-laundering scheme with the Mafia that she wants out of. Why did she get involved in the first place? It boiled down to "I needed the money." Again, very unsatisfying.

*Lullaby Town* winds up being a lackluster and disappointing novel, in large part because the story wasn't *bad*, but with some thought and effort, it could have been so much better.

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## Anie says

Predictable. Shoot this guy, shoot that guy, shoot the other one. Bad guys are violent, good guys are better shots. Ho hum.

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## Harry says

Ok, a few rambling thoughts on Robert Crais. Who is this guy, where'd he come from, how'd he get so popular? Well the first thing to know is that Crais is not from California at all. He is a native of Louisiana, grew up in a blue collar family, and read his first crime novel *The Little Sister* when he was 15. And that's all it took. Chandler gave him his love for writing. Other authors that have inspired him were Hammett, Hemingway (seems like that's true of all the crime writers), Parker, and Steinbeck (huh?).

How'd he get so popular? In short: television and L.A. Requim. Robert Crais has a very impressive resume as a screenwriter for such television series as *Hill Street Blues*, *Miami Vice* (damn, I loved that show too!), *Cagney & Lacey*. But what hits home the most with Crais himself is his work on the 4 hour mini series *Cross of Fire* which is about the Ku Klux Klan and is probably more relevant to his home state of Louisiana than it is to Hollywood. Following a growing dissatisfaction of a screen writer's constraints, Crais began writing novels. L.A. Requim, which is the 8th Elvis Cole novel, is what landed him as an author that defied all genres and in it outsurpassed even the legendary Ross Macdonald.

Enough about Crais, the guy's good. So, what about Elvis Cole? Naming someone Elvis had to have been a fairly deliberate decision. To me the name seems iconic, Warholish, Disneylandish, a bit theatrical if not cynical. In fact his novels and trinkets therein are suffused with cultural icons: Spider Man mug, Jiminy Cricket (latent fantasy of wanting to be Peter Pan?), and his yellow Corvette. Even his slogan seems hamstrung with Hollywood's obsession with icons: Elvis Cole is *The world's Greatest Detective!* But in reality there's nothing ridiculous about Cole: he's tough, honest, ponders morality and ambiguity and hypocrasies while staring out the balcony window in his office. Yes, he's cynical, a smart ass, a comic relief in many ways...but behind the seeming humor lies a Dan Wesson .38, the Vietnam War, martial arts and his biggest gun of all: Joe Pike.

Joe Pike, the avenging angel, is a tool used sparingly by Crais. Use him too much and you wonder why he isn't the main character (we know Crais has struggled with this as he produced 4 separate novels featuring Pike as the hero); use him too little and you start wondering why the big guns aren't being pulled out by Elvis. What you want to do is increase the anxiety level of the reader towards the hero, not get the reader frustrated with him. Crais handles this expertly...and uses Pike to increase the anticipation in readers.

The Elvis Cole novels should be considered hard boiled detectives primarily in that Crais deviates from the traditional Romantic tradition found in detective stories and crime fiction by introducing Cole as a detective with a decidedly cynical attitude towards the emotions (i.e. apprehension, horror, terror, and awe such as are found in other crime and thriller stories). And yet, we find sprinkled throughout the books insightful observations of the world as seen through Elvis's eyes. In the following passage, Elvis observes the effects of dry brush fires raging through L.A.:

*Picture the detective at work in his office, fourth floor, Hollywood, as the Devil's Wind freight-trains down from the desert. Though dry and brutally harsh, the desert wind is clean. It pushes the smog south to the sea*

*and scrubs the sky to a crystalline blue. The air, jittery from the heat, rises in swaying tendrils like kelp from the seabed, making the city shimmer. We are never more beautiful than when we are burning.*

Like I said, it really came together following the publication of his 8th Elvis Cole novel. Pike his side kick, Lou Poitras (Cole's detective friend) gruffy as ever, shifting view points, a relaxation of Cole's zany character...it all came together following L.A. Requiem. So, believe me. All in all, you will not be disappointed with the Elvis Cole series. There are a lot of these novels so sit back and enjoy! I most certainly did.

As with all series reviews, this one covers all the Elvis Cole books. So if you've read this review of mine than you've read 'em all.

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## **Mike says**

A multiple time of reading these novels.

One of my fav exchanges: "I looked back at Karen and then at Peter. "Do it."

Karen said, "They're going to kill us, aren't they?"

"They're going to try. But Joe and I won't let them."

Her eyes were big and darting. She held tight to Toby's arm. "How can you stop them? There're eight of them and we're trapped here in the middle of nowhere with them."

Pike chambered a round into his shotgun. "No," he said. "They're trapped with us."

Smart-guy Elvis and the enigma Joe battle mobsters and Hollywood elite trying to help a director find the son he never wanted to be a father to.

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## **Eric\_W says**

Audiobook:

Cole is hired by an arrogant and self-absorbed Hollywood director to find his estranged wife and son, now gone for more than 10 years. He just wants to connect with his son. Finding the woman is easy enough, but Cole learns she is now the VP of a small-town bank who is being used by some Boston mob bosses to launder money.

Now, I think Cole screwed up by trying to fix things in his macho way. A quick call to the FBI (despite her reluctance to enter witness protection) might have solved things since she had evidence of all sorts of wrongdoing. Cole risked messing up her life and that of her kid. She wanted nothing to do with Peter, the Hollywood bigshot, and to my way of thinking should have had nothing to do with Cole either.

All that aside, at least Cole uses his brain to figure a way out for her by pitting one member of the "family" against another. The spate of violence at the end is really not their doing. It was also refreshing that neither Cole nor Pike found it necessary to jump in Karen's bed.

Satisfactory, although Pike starts to grate after a while.

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## **Kemper says**

Now that's more like it!

I'd been hoping that I'd enjoy this series to give me some fresh detective stories, but the results had been mixed so far. The Monkey's Raincoat and Stalking the Angel had a lot I liked, but Elvis Cole and his bad-ass friend Joe Pike were seeming like pale imitations of Robert B. Parker's Spenser & Hawk to me. Plus, the over the top quirkiness of Elvis's character and his constant smart ass comments got on my nerves. I'm now thinking that Crais needed a few books to find his own rhythm, and I enjoyed the hell out of this third book in the series.

Elvis gets hired by famous action movie director Peter Alan Nelson to locate the son he had from a brief marriage ten years earlier. Nelson is a self-centered prick and supreme asshole enabled by the movie studio and a squad of sycophants. He's like a less charming version of Brett Ratner. Elvis quickly tracks down the ex-wife Karen to a small town in Connecticut where she's built a good life for her and her son, but she's having some issues with being tangled up with the Mafia and a psychotic gangster. Elvis wants to help Karen out, but dealing with the mob will be easy compared to trying to cope with Peter Alan Nelson and his gigantic ego.

I got to meet Robert Crais and watch him on a couple of panels at Bouchercon in St. Louis, and after listening to the guy, my opinion of him improved tremendously. (See Dan's write-up about our Bouchercon adventure and watching an interview with Crais for more details.)

There were several things that impressed me about Crais. He seemed to take his writing very seriously while still obviously enjoying the hell out of his success and having a great sense of humor. I was surprised at the amount of work he said he put into the books because I think a lot of us tend to imagine that popular thriller writers churn these books out with a minimum of effort while checking their bank accounts, but per Crais, he goes through some long hours in front of the computer and is more than a little frustrated that it hasn't gotten easier over the years like he once thought it would.

I also liked that Crais can admit when he's made mistakes and then corrects them. One of my biggest complaints about the first couple of Cole novels was that Elvis was just such a relentless smart ass. I like a wise cracking detective as much as the next crime fiction fan, but if the hero responds with snark to every situation, it gets old in a hurry. Crais said that he realized early in the series that you can't use humor to respond to things like serious crimes, and he scaled that back. It was evident in this book because when things get ugly, Elvis doesn't react with a parade of one-liners like he did in the previous books.

I think I'm on my way to becoming a big fan of Robert Crais. You can check out some of the Bouchercon interview I mentioned here.

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## **Dorothy says**

The World's Greatest Detective, Elvis Cole, gets hired by the world's third most famous movie director, Peter

Alan Nelson, to locate his ex-wife and son whom he lost contact with when the son was just a baby more than ten years ago. Nelson is a world-class narcissist that the movie studios just can't say no to, because he makes so much money for them with his adventure films. He always travels with an entourage and every sentence, every thought begins and ends with "I."

Finding the ex-wife and son proves to be easy enough for the World's Greatest Detective, even though she has changed her name and tried to obliterate any trace of her relationship with Nelson. She's living in a small town in Connecticut where she has forged a good life for herself and her son. She's the manager of the local bank and a realtor. Unfortunately, her position at the bank has put her in the clutches of a local gangster and mafia-type, who is forcing her to help launder his ill-gotten gains. She is caught and can't get free.

When he talks to her, Elvis learns that she doesn't want any part of her egotistical ex-husband or his money. She has never told her son who his father is. What she does want is to get free of the mafia and to be able to continue to live the quiet, normal life of a small town businesswoman and mother. The World's Greatest Detective offers to help her make that happen.

But in order to accomplish that, of course, Elvis has to call in the big guns - i.e, his partner, Joe Pike. Once Pike is in town, they formulate a plan to try to dislodge that unmovable object, the mafia. Then, Peter Alan Nelson shows up and throws a monkey wrench into the works.

This was the third in Robert Crais' Elvis Cole series and it seems to be a bit of a turning point. The first two books featured Elvis making one wisecrack after another. His response to any and every situation was the sarcastic retort. This one showed Elvis being somewhat more serious. The humor was still evident but it was toned down a bit. That was an improvement, in my opinion. Snark is perfectly fine in small doses, but a little goes a long way, especially when the character is dealing with life or death situations.

The story takes several twists and turns before building toward the final shootout which seems to be the trademark of a Crais thriller. I lost track of the body count, but all except one were bad guys - mostly *very* bad guys - and the reader is not unhappy to see them go.

These stories have been compared, both favorably and unfavorably, to Robert B. Parker's Spenser series. They also remind me somewhat of Lee Child's Reacher series. Elvis isn't quite the lone rolling stone that Reacher is, but their military backgrounds and personalities have similarities.

Elvis Cole and Joe Pike are an interesting duo, always on the side of the angels. I find it fascinating that no matter how many bad guys they whack, they never get arrested or asked too many embarrassing questions about the carnage. I guess the angels must be on their side, too.

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## **Carol. says**

Finally--I found a new detective series that manages to entertain without offending. Fabulous. I don't mean that the book is fabulous; I was starting to despair that I could find a private eye series that didn't involve cats or serial killers. Seriously, people--does it have to be one or the other? I mean honestly--cats are kind of serial killers, right?



I started with this one based on friends' reviews--thanks, friends. Published in 1992, there's definitely an aspect that feels very period to me, but it's done well enough so *forgetaboutit*.

The story has a two part structure, so there isn't much to say about the second without spoiling the first. Our hero is Elvis Cole, a private eye with a smart mouth, no style sense (unless you call a sweatshirt with Mickey Mouse a style), and extensive martial arts training. A good friend asks him to meet with a ridiculously famous Hollywood director who wants him to find his ex-wife and son who he hasn't had contact with in over ten years. Cole doesn't ask enough questions, of course, but who can blame him? Mr. Hollywood Director got on my last nerve as well. Of course, not everyone appreciates Elvis' humor:

**"Donnie Brewster made the nervous frown. 'Stop with the humor, okay? I tell him you're brilliant and gifted, you make with the humor, he's gonna know that you're not.'"**

Elvis is not in the least a tortured soul, and as for his bestie, Joe Pike, well, who knows? He's a man of few words.

**"Pike didn't answer.**

**'You know the director, Peter Alan Nelsen? He's our client.'**

**Pike didn't answer some more. Trying to talk with Pike is like carrying on a fill-in-the-blank conversation."**

The writing is interesting, with thoughtful bits interwoven. Crais' style is occasionally deceptively simple, with a reliance on 'and' that would have had my English teacher reaching for the red pen.

**"I closed the toilet lid and sat on the seat and felt myself living. I felt the blood move and the lungs work and the muscles pull against bone. I hurt, but it was better than being in the hospital and better than being dead."**

The plotting managed to surprise me more with a deviation from the traditional missing persons format and then a couple of twists based on actions that were completely logical within character context, just not within the mystery plot format. I appreciated that the missing woman was given a great deal of agency, respect and self-awareness. Kudos to Crais for being ahead of his time.

As far as I can tell, the only downside is that Elvis does indeed own a cat, who probably a closet serial killer. I'll have to learn to tolerate it. Humor, decent writing, a general lack of overt sexism and an absence of torture means this is easily a four star genre read and a series I'll continue.

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## **Eric says**

**Lullaby Town**, the third book in the Elvis Cole series, starts off very slowly. The opening chapters serve as a character study of arrogant Hollywood director Peter Allen Nelson, followed by a less than inspiring missing person search by Cole for Nelson's estranged ex-wife. However, the story finally starts to pick up momentum when it reaches the East Coast, where the mafia, and hence, all of this book's action, is.

A pattern in this series is starting to emerge, beginning with Cole working alone to solve a mystery, then bringing in Pike when things start to get out of hand, and climaxing with a gunfight with that book's bad guys. Cole and Pike have yet to be interrogated by the police for their many -- albeit justified -- killings. At some point, doesn't the body count alone have to get them in trouble?

I prefer Cole and Pike in L.A., as I didn't think Crais got the overall feel of New York City right (although, to be fair, at some points his details were spot on). I would also like to see more of the enigmatic Joe Pike, who is easily the most interesting character in the entire series.

I'll continue reading this series -- I've heard it gets stronger as it progresses -- but I won't listen to another audiobook, as I didn't care for the narrator's interpretation of Elvis Cole (which is important, as it is first-person narrated). Not to say he did a bad job in any objective way, but it was like seeing an actor play a character differently than you pictured them in your imagination.

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### **Wendy says**

Another great Elvis Cole story!

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### **Alex says**

I really enjoy this series of Elvis Cole mysteries. I love the humour and style of these stories and Lullaby Town is my favourite of the series so far. I have only fairly recently discovered Robert Crais and am starting from the beginning.

These stories are set in LA, Elvis Cole being a smart mouthed, wise-ass, Private Detective. His partner, Joe Pike, is probably one of the minimally powerful characters in modern crime fiction. Here they are hired by an uber egotistical and spoilt "action" film director to find his ex wife and the son he wants to reunite with. The story is taken to New York where Cole and Pike are up against violent mafia families as they adapt to being fishes out of the water in this unfamiliar environment.

Crais keeps the story moving along at a fairly rapid pace, a feature being the dialogue he writes for all his characters as well as a snappy first person narrative. These stories zing with a link back to the humour and style of Raymond Chandler and I am excited about what I hear about the series getting better as it goes. I highly recommend this guy for lovers of crime fiction that like a humorous yet integrity-filled main character written with quick fire pacing.

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