

Nightfall

David Goodis

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“An almost perfect book, spare, balanced, and inexplicably moving.”—Geoffrey O’Brien

Jim Vanning has an identity crisis. Is he an innocent artist who just happens to have some very dangerous people interested in him? Or is he a killer on the lam from his last murder—with a satchel worth over \$300,000 in tow?

Relentlessly focused, *Nightfall* may be David Goodis’ most accomplished novel. It is a fiendishly constructed maze, filled with unpredictable pitfalls and human predators whose authenticity only makes them more terrifying.

David Goodis (1917–1967), a former pulp, radio, and Hollywood script writer, is now recognized as a leading author of crime fiction. Besides sojourns in New York City and Hollywood, he lived primarily in Philadelphia.

Nightfall Details

Date : Published May 7th 1991 by Vintage Crime/Black Lizard (first published 1947)

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Author : David Goodis

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From Reader Review *Nightfall* for online ebook

Andy says

“*Nightfall*” on the surface is your standard Man On The Run from both the Cops and the Crooks suspenser, however this is David Goodis we’re talking about, so there are several curve balls thrown at you, like the cop as a working stiff with a wife and kids, not just another badge, but another working class fuck. Even the head thug has his moment of wistfulness, reminiscing over his lost teenage love. But more importantly, the story is told in varying hues of color like an Impressionist painting.

Sample: “Lavender light came down on a purplish river...and then red came into it, glaring red, the hood and fenders of the smashed station wagon, the hard gray of the boulder against which the wrecked car was resting, the hard gray turning into black, the black of the revolver...” This is noir at its most avant-garde.

Rebecca McNutt says

Nightfall was very interesting, a gripping noir novel written in a creative and suspenseful style.

John McNee says

My heart began to beat a little faster as soon as I started reading this book.

'*Nightfall*' is the first work I've read by Goodis in over a decade, but I could remember the sensation, that unease that comes with knowing something bad is about to happen.

It was there in this book, where something bad has already happened to contract artist Vanning long before we meet him, but are certain to get worse. Matters of murder and a lost satchel of money have left him in a bind, hunted by cops and crooks and on the cusp of meeting a woman who might be his salvation or his ruin.

A lot of this is familiar territory to fans of David Goodis. Noir to their core, his books returned again and again to themes of broken, desperate men battling to stay one step ahead of a dark fate.

As a result, his writing is often described as 'bleak' or 'hopeless', but that's not true. Perhaps one of the cruelest twists meted out to his protagonists is that there is hope. Last chances for happiness and love are dangled in front of our hero just long enough to inspire him to action. In a narrative where every character's motivations are constantly in question these same chances are frequently snuffed out only to be reignited (however modestly) a few chapters later.

It's a slim book, with the action moving at a brisk pace. Things move so quickly in fact - especially near the climax - that the story suffers a little. A little more room to breathe in the final pages (which recall the exposition-heavy fast-talking monologues that frequently closed out detective pictures) would have been nice, but some might call this nitpicking.

Prose is frequently poetic, but always spare. Goodis can't have been getting paid by the word. It's

remarkable, however, than while his language is restrained and unsentimental, he picks his moments to make big emotional statements, reminding us that the loneliest, darkest hours of night come just before the dawn.

Tfitoby says

One of the finest novels I read in 2011 was *Shoot the Piano Player* and so for Christmas I asked for some more David Goodis. He's quite hard to come by in Perth it seems, so the chances of me ever seeing his stuff come through my shop was slim to none.

This version of the Goodis masterpiece *Nightfall* was sold by Black Mask publishing as *The Dark Chase* for reasons entirely unknown to me. The large format printing and the odd cover 'art' make for an unusual reading experience. However I can happily report that it was all worth it, David Goodis certainly seemed to have more than one very good novel in his career.

Whilst this story bears many similarities with *Shoot The Piano Player* in terms of an innocent, desperate protagonist down on his luck with seemingly no hope for escape, this one is more about the clash between good and bad and less about the internal conflict. If *Piano Player* was similar to Ernest Hemingway then *Nightfall* was perhaps closer to Raymond Chandler and it is this difference which sets this novel one step away from greatness.

The constant chasing of one kind or another that each of the characters is undertaking throughout the story really helps to keep the pages flying past and the imagined interactions between Vanning and Fraser are an interesting development of the cat and mouse theme.

Josh says

Vanning – a victim of circumstance is placed in the perfect and unforgiving wrong man scenario. Touted as a murderer, thief, and artist (yep there is some legitimacy to the protagonist), Vanning is the classic case of a man stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the run from the law and a gang of bank robbers, Vanning lives a life filled with paranoia and mistrust. In his mind, he's innocent of the crimes he's accused - his actions vindicated by circumstance yet there's a subtle cloudiness to the believability of his mantra.

Like many other Goodis novels, '*Nightfall*' questions the lead characters sincerity and state of mind. You never quite know if they are honest or are feigning innocence to mask sinister motives. This stems true for Vanning, the comely Martha, and Fraser – the man with whom Vanning shares a cat and mouse relationship.

The overtly insecure and semi-obsessive cop, Fraser is grounded only by his wife who seems to be the backbone of his sanity and manhood for that matter. With one eye on Vanning and another on the reward, Fraser acts as a lone wolf resembling more conventional PI than police (minus the hard-boiled persona).

It takes a good writer to evoke reader emotion, and Goodis is a great writer - I really disliked Fraser while I was genuinely concerned for the health and wellbeing of Vanning. That said; the characters alone weren't quite enough to champion the story. The plot was good enough and the overall sense of chasing reality was executed well, however the dialogue fuelled by unbelievable character emotions (Vanning falling too easily in love for instance) spoiled what was a solid premise.

In 'Nightfall' the criminal element is secondary with human interaction the primary driver – had the dialogue and believability been a little more polished this would've worked well, however it just failed to hit the right notes but was still enjoyable to read. 3 stars.

This review is from 'Nightfall' which appears in David Goodis: Five Noir Novels of the 1940s and 50s:
<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/12...>

Steven says

The plot of the movie version is considerably different, which is a bit surprising as Goodis' story line here is quite cinematic. You have two narrative focalizers, Vanning, the noir "victim" and Fraser the detective who is shadowing him. And then you have the other criminals who are pursuing Vanning. No femme fatale per se, but Martha's role is left uncertain, and that adds good dramatic tension at several key points. To say much more about the plot or the characters gets into spoiler territory as most of the enjoyment of the read is they way story unfolds as you go, that, along with Goodis' propulsive prose style makes this a good page turner. My only complaint would be that some of the dialog could have been trimmed quite a bit without any loss.

Jennifer says

A fast-paced noir detective story, this one boils along nicely with a confused and haunted narrator who's trying to escape a murder that he is unable to prove was self-defense. Maybe not the most classic of noir stories, as both the narrator and the love interest are less jaded and more innocent than one would expect of the genre, but it also includes a wonderful character in the form of the detective trailing the narrator. He's trained in psychology and is thus a sort of early version of a profiler--the relationship between him and the narrator is tense and interesting.

Antonius Block says

Nightfall was Goodis' third novel, after *Dark Passage* and before *Of Missing Persons*, and it comes across as an amalgamation of the two. It concerns two characters. One, Vanning, is a perennial Goodis hero: a lonely, dejected war veteran who by chance and contrived circumstance winds up a fugitive from both the law and a den of thieves. The other, Fraser, is a happily married but stressed out cop, who is very much a forerunner for the hero in *Of Missing Persons*.

Vanning's fugitive status is simply a means for Goodis to revel in the misery derived from his intense loneliness. His self-pity is so overwhelming that his own safety is of little to no importance to him; being 33, unmarried, and unable to get on with his life is the true cause of his despair. Everywhere he looks, hearing men gloat about their wives, amplifies his own tormented bitterness; he is a great example of what led one critic to perceptively observe that Goodis wrote "emotional autobiography disguised as lurid melodrama."

It's that sense of infusing his own experiences and emotions into his work that gives Goodis' novels such a feeling of authenticity, despite their often contrived plots. He appeals to me for much the same reason that Bergman appeals to me, as in their work I see the working out of their own personal demons and failures, and this in turn imbues their work with such emotional vitality.

In any event, *Nightfall* isn't one of Goodis' best works. Still in his early period, he hasn't quite found his groove; there's a willed sense of happiness and redemption here, along with a distancing created through the oscillating viewpoints that prevents this book from reaching the depths of his greatest works. Still, it's interesting to see how the road to those most despairing novels was reached.

Laura says

3.5 ?

Edwin says

An exceptional psychological thriller told from the perspectives of an innocent man accused of robbery and murder, and the sympathetic detective obsessed with finding out the truth. More than a typical crime thriller, the novel is essentially a character study of an emotionally damaged man on the run, pursued by both criminals and police, looking for redemption but without a clear path, alone and without hope. Goodis pulls off the dual narratives with great aplomb. His lean prose and colorful dialogue propel the tight plot to a very satisfying conclusion.

Eldonfoil TH*E Whatever Champion says

This is a wonderful edition by Millipede Press published in 2007. I'll gladly accept a couple of typographical errors for the excellent cover, informative introduction, and an extra story set in Colombo added at the end of the novel.

Nightfall doesn't hold the overall bleakness and downright down-and-out-ed-ness that Goodis is known for, and the plot has a couple of areas that aren't too credible, but this story has some nice things going for it even beyond the vibrant lingo, top-notch dialogue, and heavy hitting narrative.

The first thing is that all the characters seem to be hunting each other on different levels. That may not be so novel in noir, but in places there is something of a subtlety about it to give a pinch of originality as it mixes with a polite tension. More interesting is the psychological drive of the storytelling within the characterization. Again, on the one hand, it's obvious in the story, but there is a delicacy about it that seems more distinct, even more real. What is really nice is when the dialogue is loaded with various characters' psychological game play, particularly in a couple of places where I began to wonder what was going through the characters' minds----what level are they playing on? what are they trying to achieve? are they revealing their minds and souls or just shooting to gain some advantage?

All in all, this is not Goodis' best, but I find plenty in it to admire.

"The streets paraded toward him like collections of black shapes, living but not moving."

"...and they were in the lobby and a few people were standing around doing nothing the way only people in hotel lobbies can do nothing."

Bert says

So lucky to find this in the bargain bin at Troutmark, you hardly ever see a Goodis anywhere and he's one of the best. This was fairly formulaic, guy on the run for a crime he didn't commit, but had a nice touch of seeing the detective's perspective in alternate chapters, and a lovely compassionate fella he is too. Also, Goodis' writing is reliably a notch better than most and this got pretty tense by the end, my fingernails got right chewed.

John says

What an astonishing little jewel of a book this is. Commercial artist Jim Vanning allows himself to be picked up in a NYC bar by the attractive Martha Gardner, only to realize too late that she's led him into the clutches of three hoodlums. Eight months ago his path crossed theirs as they were on the run with the proceeds of a bank job in Seattle. At the time they decided to shut his mouth forever, but he was able to startle the designated killer and kill him instead. In more or less a fugue state, Jim took off through the countryside, realizing at one stage that he was carrying a satchel stuffed with dough and at another that he'd lost it. He's been more or less in hiding ever since. But they've found him again, and they want their money back. The trouble is, he doesn't have the first idea where he lost it.

Jim, who's not unresourceful, manages to escape from them once more. But he realizes he can't live the rest of his life flitting from city to city, forever worrying that the gangsters might be round the next corner. He decides to see if he can turn the tables, and become the hunter himself. Little does he know that one of the NYPD's best detectives, Fraser, is in turn dogging *him* . . .

This is a short novel, with almost everything by way of description pared down to the minimum. This makes the narrative very fast-moving, of course -- *Nightfall's* a truly gripping read -- but it also, perhaps surprisingly, gives the text a tremendous *grace*. There's something almost musical to it. I'm not sure quite how Goodis managed to achieve this, but I want to find out because I want to be able to do it too. There's also a near-hallucinatory effect in some parts of the tale, as if we're being offered a choice of which narrative of history we want to believe. This all resolves, in fact, but the delicious sensation of the ambiguity lingers.

Then, too, there are the characters. The two standouts are Fraser and the leader of the hoodlums, John. Fraser's character could almost be designated Fraser-and-his-wife, because the domesticity revealed through their conversations is what brings Fraser to such life on the page. John is similarly vivid. Where his colleagues are mere thugs with a sideline in sadism, John is almost a gentle person, whose dreams are of living with his girl on a remote Caribbean island and who takes any opportunity to wax philosophical about his worldview.

I finished reading this book yesterday evening. By the time I'd had my supper there had popped into my inbox an email alert from the blog *Everything Noir* headed: "[New post] Review: Nightfall." As you can imagine, my jaw dropped; I felt as if I'd been myself dragged into that vortex of uncertainty Goodis had been depicting! What had happened was that, by sheerest coincidence, Bryan at *Everything Noir* had been writing about the 1957 movie based on the book. Except, as Bryan explains, in a way the book was based on the movie, even though published ten years before the latter's release. It seems Goodis had this screenplay that

no one in Hollywood wanted to make . . . For more of the details, see Bryan's piece.

Many, many years ago I read the David Goodis volume of the Black Box series of noir omnibuses that Maxim Jakubowski edited. I can't now remember anything about the three or four novels contained therein, beyond that I was impressed by what I read. I'm not sure why it's taken me until now to return to Goodis, but I do know I'm planning to read more by him soon.

Nancy Oakes says

before I post a review, I have to share this photo. I sliced my thumb on a fan blade, didn't realize it (I'm so accident prone I'm always doing something like this), and settled in to read. Before I turned the page, I looked down and saw blood. How appropriate for reading crime fiction! Review shortly.

Kathy Davie says

A psychological suspense crime story set just after World War II.

My Take

Nightfall is an interesting blend of a staccato-like series of events all smoothed over, almost like the humidity in this story, heating up events, slowing things down, rolling over the rough edges. It's just a blip of time for Vanning, for us, yet it encompasses eight months.

Seen from today's perspective, it's an awkward use of psychology and profiling as Goodis pushes new frontiers in this thriller, slipping back and forth between his protagonist's current life and events in the past, teasing us with just enough to begin to answer questions, to raise new ones. (Keep in mind that this story was first published in 1947.) It's very well done even if it does drive me a bit nuts.

I like how Goodis portrays Fraser as a cop who questions. He has a conscience and really wants the right bad guy in jail. He thinks, he investigates while giving us free access to how he's considering what should happen next. He certainly provides Vanning with a lo-o-ong leash.

Vanning is an interesting hero. Low-key, unassuming, and totally honest even when threatened with torture. It's a different approach having a hero admit to being afraid and yet mildly snarky because he "thought it was fun". He's accepting and yet still wants to live. Then there's his interaction with Fraser. Not what you'd expect between a killer and a cop.

I don't understand why killing the man is such a trauma for Vanning. He was in the navy during the war. He must have killed there. Of course, it's different when you're shooting under orders during a battle from shooting someone as a civilian. Even if you are in danger.

What's with the back-and-forth with the cab driver? Why is Vanning attracted to Martha? I understand the initial attraction, but when she betrays him...and he keeps on trusting her. Goodis doesn't give us any reason

for this, except in words, nor for why she appears to so quickly trust and betray him. Again.

The Story

The war is over and Vanning has mustered out. He's on his way in his new blue convertible. On his way to a job he's looking forward to when he pulls to the side of the road in the mountains of Colorado to help at an accident. A good Samaritan act that goes all wrong when he becomes a hostage.

A surprisingly easy escape turns into a series of low-key jobs until he turns up in Manhattan and rebuilds his portfolio. As the months go by, his reputation builds, but his nights get worse. Reliving his nightmare. Worrying about being found by the men who took him prisoner at gunpoint. Flashbacks of his escape through the woods.

The Characters

James Vanning is a painter with a degree in engineering, a commercial artist freelancing for ad agencies just after World War II.

Fraser is a police detective fascinated by psychology and charged with finding a murdered and the bank robbers. **Mrs. Fraser** is his supportive wife, a woman he comes to realize he loves as he adores his children. **Martha Gardner** is a glass buyer for Macy's and eager to help the police.

Sam, Pete, and John have been hunting for Vanning for some time now. He took something they want. And they'll do whatever they want to, to get it back. **Fred Harrison** was the fourth, the man who tidied up.

The Cover

The version I read was published in 1947 and had a cloth cover.

Jim Vanning's secret life is coming to an end. The stress has been terrible on him. It's only at *Nightfall* that he feels safe to leave, but not safe enough to sleep.

Ed says

Nightfall is the third David Goodis novel I've read, and I'm hooked on his compact, visceral, and vivid crime titles. The basic premise in Nightfall concerns an innocent man--Jim Vanning--who by happenstance ends up with a satchel of 300 grand. Then he loses it while fleeing through the boondocks, and he can't remember just where. A likely story. Of course, he's in love with a young lady--Martha Gardner--who may, or may not, be involved in the money's baffling disappearance. I like the seamless way that Goodis transitions between the present story and his back story. I also watched for his use of colors, especially red, in the narrative. The police detective Fraser is a dapper, smart copper who tracks Vanning, but also believes in his innocence. A clever, entertaining read spread out over two evenings, Nightfall was a noir winner for me and well worth rereading at some point.

Still says

Since embarking upon a marathon read of David Goodis (with the occasional interruption of reading lesser novels by more contemporary authors), I have been completely stunned by his unique narrative voice.

But this one- oh, my sweet banana!

NIGHTFALL might be my favorite Goodis so far. It would make a terrific film noir and was in fact made into one directed by the immortal film director Jacques Tourneur in 1957 starring the great Aldo Ray as protagonist-in-a-jam and on-the-lam "James (Jim) Vanning" and Vanning's dogged villainous pursuer, "John" as portrayed by one of my favorites: Brian Keith.

This was such a terrific reading experience that I'm tempted to encourage any Goodis new-comers to start with this one but if you do you'll only wind up expecting this kind of action-driven thrill-packed suspenseful noir with every Goodis novel you encounter.

Most of Goodis' novels are character driven. Studies of men from upper middle-class backgrounds who have descended into the grim slime of poverty and associations with petty criminals. These guys also usually have a craving for bad, bad, bad, mostly overly voluptuous and almost always sexually dominant femme fatales. The cause of this is usually due to some basic flaw in the protagonist's personality or circumstances that led him to make foolish moves that greased the tracks for his slide down into life's "other side" or else oblivion.

"Jim Vanning" in **NIGHTFALL** is not such a man. He's just another schmuck like you or me who gets involved with a deadly gang of double-crossing bank robbing pros who set him up to be their fall guy in an ill-fated heist.

I can't say more about this novel. It's too easy to let a spoiler or two slip out.
You read this and you just want to rhapsodize the praises of David Goodis.
David Goodis is the patron saint of the hard-luck loser.

He's better than any two of your favorite noirists.
I thought nobody could beat Charles Willeford at this game.
I thought Jim Thompson was as tough as they come.
I thought no character ever cracked wiser than Philip Marlowe when he's run out of luck.
I was wrong.

David Goodis is a writer of breath-taking prose and a creator of a hopelessness no genre character ever had to claw his way out of.

'...the hard gray turning into black, the black of the revolver, the black remaining as more colors moved in. The green of the hotel room, the orange carpet, or maybe it wasn't orange - it could have been purple, a lot of those colors could have been other colors - but the one color about which there was no mistake was black. Because black was the color of a gun...'

Glenn Russell says

Back when David Goodis' 1947 noir novel *Nightfall* was first published, Beat Generation critic Seymour Krim wrote as part of his book review for the *New York Times*: "There is much Freud in the air, much Faulkner in the sentence, much Hemingway in the talk. But any way you slice it, it's the old chase again." And what a chase we have! Goodis serves up big, strong James Vanning as the ultimate victim of circumstances.

Vanning is ex-Navy, driving to Chicago where his new dream job as a commercial artist awaits, when he rounds a bend and hits a broken down station wagon. No sooner does he come to a halt than a serious-looking fellow walks up and points a gun between his eyes. Turns out, gunslinger and his two buddies crashed their getaway car fleeing from a Seattle bank robbery. They need a car and Vanning's car will do just fine. Vanning is forced to join them - he's seen too much.

The four travel to a hotel in Denver and the robbers put Vanning in the bathroom. After some time, Vanning tries the door, its unlocked and when he comes out, to his amazement, he's alone with the sack of bills and a revolver sitting out in the open on a bureau. He grabs both and flees.

But he doesn't get far; in the hallway a stranger sticks a gun in his ribs (every citizen has the right to bear arms) and forces Vanning to take a side exit. Once alone, far from the hotel and out in the woods, the stranger lets down his guard and Vanning pulls out the revolver and shoots as an act of self-defense. He grabs the sack and runs for it but in his haste and terror, Vanning loses the money along the way.

Thus we have James Vanning, a man on the run, pursued left and right, bank robbers on one side who think he still has their money and police on the other who deduce he committed grand larceny and murder. A hunted man, James Vanning makes his way to New York City's Greenwich Village, changes his name and sets up his own studio to work as a commercial artist.

David Goodis is good at writing novels about the guy on the run, like *Dark Passage* where Vince Parry is wrongly handed a life sentence for allegedly murdering his wife and becomes a perpetual fugitive from the law (a controversy developed between Goodis and ABC over their prime time TV show, *The Fugitive*). Bleak, nihilist *Black Friday* is another such novel featuring Al Hart bolting to Philadelphia after killing his brother. Al gets mixed up with gangsters in the City of Brotherly Shove with heaps of Goodis-style sex and violence in the mix. *Black Friday* is pulp fiction, but this book is worth the read to observe the close connection between American postwar fiction and stark alienation portrayed by French existentialists such as Camus and Sartre.

On the topic of pulp fiction, it is worth noting as a beginning writer under a string of pseudonyms David Goodis churned out dozens and dozens and dozens of novels at a furious pace, sometimes a book a week. This hardboiled rock 'em sock 'em dime store writing style carried through to Goodis' more mature fiction collected in the prestigious *Library of America*, works like *Down There (Shoot the Piano Player)*, *Dark Passage*, *The Burglar* and *Nightfall*. This being the case, I would modify the above Seymour Krim quote to "much Faulkner and Raymond Chandler in the sentence, much Hemingway and Jim Thompson in the talk."

James Vanning is 32, an ordinary, honest, All-American kind of guy who desires first and foremost a loving wife and kids. I can picture the typical reader, a family man, in the late 1940s forking across his hard won quarter to read all about someone much like himself caught in the snare of stolen loot and murder. As a study in cover design for reader appeal, check out the two covers below: the lurid original from 1947 destined for the dime store and the 1991 reissue that found its way to bookstores:

Nightfall, a psychological thriller complete with intellectual, empathetic detective and heart of gold knockout dame. One of my favorite parts is how James Vanning eventually realizes he isn't going to win points with the gangsters by being honest. Like Hansel and Gretel confronting the wicked witch, Vanning learns what is needed is not honesty but cleverness.

And how about those two Denver mysteries: Why did Vanning find the money and revolver sitting out for the taking? What ever happened to all that cash? The answers are revealed in the dramatic closing scene. Slap down your quarters on the counter, or, more likely, punch the purchase button on your computer to find out all about it.

American author David Goodis, 1917 - 1967

Jeff says

Nightfall (1947) This is David Goodis's third novel, written the year after his breakthrough suspense novel *Dark Passage* (1946). Jim Vanning is a commercial artist living in Greenwich Village. He has a legitimate Madison Avenue job creating art for advertisements, but he's also in hiding because he's wanted in Wyoming for the murder of a man who led a robbery of \$350,000 from a bank in Seattle. Needless to say, he's wanted, both by the police and by the bank robbers because after he killed the bank robber in self defense, he hid the money. But he can't remember where the money is hidden because he has something called "regressive amnesia" because he associated the bag of cash with killing a man. How is he diagnosed within the novel? Well, Fraser, a NYC cop who is following him to find out what happened to the cash, also happens to study psychology; he's got Freud and Jung and Horney and Menninger on his bookshelf at home. Fraser also senses, because of his psychology background and keen intuitive sense, that Vanning really isn't guilty of the murder.

The story has a rotating third person attached viewpoint as it goes back and forth between Vanning and Fraser. There may also be a scene or two told from the point of John or Sam or Pete, the three bank robbers who are looking for him to force him to take them to the money. They capture and torture him for a while, but Vanning finally escapes, and, in the end, helps Fraser get paid to the desperadoes.

Stylistically, this is an interesting book. Like Goodis' other books, the novel has oneiric (dream-like) qualities. In more than one scene Vanning goes so deeply into the past that he has conversations and experiences things that never happen. There's also a scene where Fraser is observing Vanning with binoculars and has a conversation with Vanning that, well, never actually happens. It's an odd stylistic device for a pulp crime novel, but one that other fifties pulp writers, Jim Thompson in particular, used occasionally. And Goodis does it during key scenes, such as the one where Vanning is being tortured by Sam and Pete, or later when he rescues Fraser from Sam and Pete.

The happy ending is pretty much telegraphed, and John, the head bad guy, turns out to be very obliging about being caught and imprisoned and even makes sardonic remarks to and about Vanning during the climactic scene. It's an odd piece, to be sure, but I kind of enjoyed it. 10/21/13

Franky says

This is one of those novels that is difficult to review without giving away spoilers, so I'll try to just give

commentary about the book.

Goodis' protagonists and antiheroes have a way of wavering between two distinctly different paths amid life forces propelling them towards one ultimate choice. There is always a gray area in the antihero where we can see that while he is fallible, he is conscious of the world about him, even philosophical, and this gives him a sense of nobility. Such is the case with *Nightfall*'s protagonist, Jim Vanning, a 30-something man who is in quite a mix with some unruly, thuggish types when *Nightfall* begins.

It seems that Vanning has a past. Or does he? Something about a murder, Colorado, a broken down car and a big score, \$300,000. These are the pieces, but there is quite a bit of figuring and unraveling to be done to figure out just how things went down.

Interesting about *Nightfall* is Goodis' way of following Vanning through the course of the plot, shifting from past memories of the events in Colorado, and then coming back to the present time. All the while there is a level of ambiguity in the air, a sense that we are given some facts but not all is being revealed. During the course of the narrative, we, along with the many other characters, try to absorb the identity of Vanning and come to some conclusions about who he really is. Vanning's own sense of disillusion and skepticism even keep him in the dark, as he is trying to uncover his true self as well.

At one end, we have the thugs who want answers about the lute. At the other end, we have Vanning. However, in the middle of everything is a beautiful woman named Martha (we aren't quite sure whose side she is on), and a cop named Fraser. Fraser thinks he has Vanning figured out, but he needs answers as well.

Nightfall is dark, but has more of a cerebral, psychological, understated edge to it. One thing you can always count on out of Goodis: a character driven novel that really digs in to one character and never lets go.

This edition also has a very good introduction that discusses many of Goodis' other works as well as his life.
