



Descending Memphis

Robert R. Moss

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Praise for *Descending Memphis*

“... a captivating detective story with ... accurate cultural references, period detail, and deft handling of daily life and relationships. ... a satisfying read, well-written and entertaining.”

– **Craig Morrison**, author of *Go Cat Go! Rockabilly Music and Its Makers*

“Based in Memphis ’56, this story (is) rife with crazy twists and turns makes for compelling reading!”

– **Steven Blush**, author of *New York Rock: From the Rise of The Velvet Underground to the Fall of CBGB, American Hardcore, and American Hair Metal*

“Descending Memphis speeds along like a bullet blasting from the barrel of a gun. Five Stars!”

– **Tony Shea**, Editor-in-Chief, *Shea Magazine*

“Observant and exciting page-turner that bridges genres with ease — a joy to read. ... an impressive stab at something more literary in nature. ... Descending Memphis covers a lot of ground with a mix of economy and style.”

– **Glenn Griffith**, *A Pessimist Is Never Disappointed*

Rock 'n' Roll is easy

Finding your way is not

Descending Memphis is a detective story/coming-of-age story written by Robert R. Moss, a former member of several prominent bands that were part of the Washington D.C. music scene of the early 1980s.

Memphis, 1956. Rock 'n' Roll explodes onto the scene. And Tommy Rhodden just wants a part of it. But for now, Tommy's a small-time private eye recovering stolen merchandise and trying to keep the law from shutting him down.

That is until Tommy gets a call from the wealthy wife of a prominent local businessman. And goes from searching for hot cars to one hot chick—in the form of a missing seventeen-year-old girl—who's wild about Rock 'n' Roll.

From there Tommy encounters murder, uncovers rackets and rubs shoulders with corrupt politicians. He gets shaken down by crooked cops, confronts racial tensions and winds up in more trouble than he could ever imagine. But when he least expects it, Tommy gets the chance he always dreamed of. Because just like the detective business, Rock 'n' Roll is never what it seems to be.

Packed with historical references that capture the place and period, *Descending Memphis* blends the twists and action of the detective and thriller genres with some soul searching questions found in a coming-of-age story.

For more info see:

<https://www.facebook.com/DescendingMe...>

<http://www.descendingmemphis.com>

Descending Memphis Details

Date : Published May 28th 2015 by Valor Books

ISBN : 9780692364222

Author : Robert R. Moss

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction

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From Reader Review Descending Memphis for online ebook

Michelle says

Got a chance to finish the book with my busy schedule. I want to thank Robert Moss for such a good book. If you need to get your mind off of the stressors of real life it's the perfect get away. Keep up the great books and can't wait to read more. This gave me a few hours where I didn't have to worry about everything and was drawn into every word of the book.

R. says

Descending Memphis is the debut novel of promising writer Robert R. Moss. Set in the still youthful years of rock'n'roll, Descending Memphis retells the stories of a simpler era as seen through the eyes of the semi-established PI Tommy Rhodeen. In Rhodeen, Moss creates a personification of the times, and the music, he writes about in that Rhodeen straddles the bounds of social decency and lightweight criminal activity. There is a time and place for every man, and Rhodeen's "acceptance" in both ends of the spectrum lands him his first missing person case. Along the way, Moss presents a deft view of race and social order of the South in late 50's-early 60's America; the portrayal is nuanced and seamless in his story, avoiding a showy indictment that might overtake the other elements of the story.

Moss is a capable writer who tells a stripped down, slightly stylized story. There are times that Moss slices the writing too lean, and reads as if it is the author's short hand to himself. There are a few rough spots in the flow of the story, as seemingly incongruous scenes bump into one another, and fight for dominance. This is particularly true when Rhodeen suddenly seems on his way to rock'n'roll immortality. Moss displays flashes of brilliance where the writing is more confident and breathes some real soul into the story line; he shows enough potential to keep an eye on in the future.

This review is based on a courtesy copy of the book provided by the author.

Liz says

I'm a dedicated reader of Crime & Noir fiction. Everything from Patricia Highsmith, Chester Himes, David Goodis to the great Raymond Chandler. A friend recommended this book as a fresh take on the genre. I was not disappointed in its singular vision & voice.

The book is set in the fifties, in Memphis Tennessee. I've been there, (not in the fifties), & Robert Moss does an amazing job of creating the unique look of the city....The sun, the water, the residents. He has a true gift for description & evocation. His characters are full, real people. The protagonist is sympathetic, smart, tough & absolutely believable. I had no idea what was coming next in the story, I was taken by surprise a number of times, which I love. Expect the unexpected with Descending Memphis.

The book is more remarkable for its intelligence & lucidity. There is real depth to the protagonist & his surroundings. Moss adds to all this a view of the racial divide of the South in the fifties. Never preachy, but cool-headed & perceptive.

Last of all is the protagonist's talent as a musician. We get to see the musical side of a singular city in a remarkable time. Anyone interested in Sun Studios & Gretsch guitars will get a kick out of this book.

It's a cliché, but, I didn't put the book down. I went to sleep when I had finished it, not before. I plan to re-read it soon.

I look forward to future novels by Robert R. Moss!!

Brian Gay says

I really enjoyed Descending Memphis. It is a fast paced detective story set in Memphis in the late '50s. The story follows the young semi-pro private investigator Tommy Rhodeen through his attempts to solve his first missing person case. While the plot line is reminiscent of classic detective fiction, the book's setting and the personality of Tommy Rhodeen give Descending Memphis a unique character.

Rhodeen is an interesting and well developed character. Many of his friends and acquaintances are petty criminals, and his inroad to private investigation - retrieving stolen property - is not entirely above the law. Nonetheless, he generally tries to do the right thing and effect a positive outcome. Part of what makes Rhodeen such a compelling character is the fact that he hasn't fully figured out what he wants to do with his life. He's more or less stumbled into private investigating, but his passion is to be a rock and roll musician. Meanwhile, his Aunt Norma would prefer that he take a conventional steady job as a mechanic. Unlike the standard protagonists of hard boiled detective fiction or film noir, Rhodeen does not come off as cynical or jaded despite his conflicted nature.

There are many twists along the way, and most of the actions that Rhodeen takes trying to solve the case have unintended results. This kept me engaged and guessing. Nonetheless, the ending surprised me and left me thinking "why didn't I see that coming?"

Bonus: If you take the time to listen to the artists that are that are mentioned in the course of the narrative, you are both in for a treat as well as a more immersive experience.

Curt Weiss says

A very interesting mix of noir, mystery, race and music set in the deep South in the 1950's at the beginnings of rock and roll. Just when you think the story is coming to an end, new twists are tossed at you. Great research by the author on the time, place and history of the setting, gives the story even more credibility. I couldn't put it down. I'm left with one question though: When is Robert's next book coming out?

Andrew says

In a classic Saturday Night Live sketch from the 1970s, a family argued whether a particular product was a dessert topping or a floor wax – it turned out, the narrator revealed, that it was both!

Is "Descending Memphis" a noir mystery, or is it a coming of age novel? It is both – Sam Spade meets

Holden Caulfield, with the additional blend of the shadow of Elvis Presley and his rockabilly colleagues looming over the book. In the hands of a less talented writer, this could have been a jumbled mess – instead, it works. Robert R. Moss orchestrates the disparate genres so that they combine to enhance each other's strengths, rather than to distract from them.

In brief – Tommy Rhodeen is a young Memphis-based private eye and aspiring musician in the new “rock and roll” format, making a meager living by acting as a broker between thieves (plus their friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and enemies) and their victims to return stolen items in return for a small “ransom”, taking a percentage off the top. He is given the chance to expand his horizons when he is hired by a member of the city's power elite to locate his missing daughter.

This novel overlays a mystery on top of another mystery, on top of a young man's quest to determine his future and establish a relationship, on top of the most revolutionary change in music in the century in the city where it happened. It catches the readers' interest and refuses to let it go – although, in my opinion, a side trip to Nashville spends too much time establishing mood and not enough advancing plot or characterization.

Watch out for Mr. Moss in the future. Better yet, get to know him now by reading “Descending Memphis”, before everyone else jumps on his bandwagon after he releases future novels.

RATING: 4 1/2 stars, rounded up to 5 stars.

DISCLOSURE: This book was provided to me free of charge in return for an honest review – hopefully a positive one, but no such commitment was requested nor offered.

Bob German says

I've been holding off on writing this review, because I wanted to do the book justice. I realized I can't, so here goes. I don't "know" Robert. I grew up listening to the bands he grew up playing with in DC. We have a number of mutual friends from that era. We share an interest in sailing. And now we have Memphis. I think my Memphis is his Memphis, from another angle. My Memphis is the Beale Street of W.C. Handy, Furry Lewis, H.B. King and more. I visited and paid tribute to those Memphis heroes some twenty years ago, on my way to seek out Leadbelly's grave.

I think it also helps that I'm a registered private investigator myself. It's almost as if the book was written for me to read.

I have a number of friends who have authored books. Two of them really stand out. *Nine Rooms Deep*, by Thomas Zimmerman, and this one.

This book excels for me, in atmosphere, plot development, and character. I can't remember the last time I read a standalone book and thought, "This needs to be a series. This character isn't finished, he has more to say and do." This book did that for me. I couldn't put it down. It colored my days while I was reading it. Maybe it was the almost ghostly musical references throughout the book, adding just enough to give me the hint of a soundtrack in my mind. Maybe it was the cold, practical violence, or the characters' pragmatic reactions to it. These places, these times, they just happen, they just are. You move on, you follow through, it isn't like you have a rainbow of choices in front of you.

I'm not an eloquent reviewer, by any stretch. But go read this book and see what I'm talking about. See if you don't want a sequel. Robert? Your move. Or Tommy's move. We're waiting.

It bothers me that it seems I can only review the Kindle Edition. I'm old school, I read an actual book that I was holding in my hand. To me, that makes a difference. Authoring a flesh-and-blood book is putting something into this world.

H.X. Bennett says

Rock'n'roll-obsessed private detective Tommy Rhodeen has carved out a niche recovering stolen property for its rightful owners. When a prominent Memphis family convinces him to try his hand at locating a missing person, Rhodeen quickly finds himself beaten up, threatened, and thoroughly confused. To solve the case, Rhodeen is forced to confront the greed, corruption, and racism that lurk just below the surface of polite society in 1956 Memphis.

Descending Memphis is a first-rate detective novel that will appeal to fans of Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, and other masters of the genre. Author Robert Moss' prose is crisp and the plot is both plausible and compelling -- an all-too-rare combination in crime fiction these days. What makes Descending Memphis even more remarkable is that it's set in the early days of rock'n'roll, years before Moss was born. Yet Moss never hits a false note, portraying segregation-era Memphis in a way that is simultaneously fascinating and off-putting and, above all, eminently believable. And, happily, Roland Janes, Charlie Feathers, and Johnny Cash make cameos. Hopefully, this is just the first of many installments in the Tommy Rhodeen saga.

Amy says

When I began reading Descending Memphis, I wasn't sure what to expect. I love a good mystery, but I tend to choose books set in either the present day or way back in history. This novel, set in Memphis, TN, in 1956, presented a time and place and set of circumstances that I'm not too familiar with. Immediately upon starting the book, I found myself drawn irresistibly into Tommy Rhodeen's world. In spare, clean prose, Robert Moss develops a portrait of a young man navigating the Jim Crow South, crossing the dangerous line between black and white Memphis as he attempts to solve a mystery involving a young, wealthy white girl who has disappeared. The dialogue feels authentic, the settings are expertly described, and the historical details made me feel as if Moss had somehow time-travelled back to Memphis in the 1950s to take in the sights, sounds, and people that made the city what it was in those days. As Tommy slips deeper into the raw, violent underbelly of Memphis in the Jim Crow south, his own past begins to haunt him. The darkness is tempered by a blossoming romance between Tommy and a young woman whose kind, luminous presence lends him strength and hope even in his most desperate hours. I love mysteries that provide truly innovative twists, and Moss delivers. I look forward to reading more from this author.

Tony Shea says

Descending Memphis is a fantastic addition to the gritty, hard-boiled detective/PI genre that speeds along

like a bullet blasting from the barrel of a gun. Written in a sharp crisp style, there's not a wasted word as Moss takes us into the world of a thoroughly lived-in Memphis of the '50s - you can smell the heat coming off the sidewalk. The book manages to be simultaneously an homage to the work of Jim Thompson, Robert Towne and Dashiell Hammett (part Hell of a Woman, part Chinatown, and part The Thin Man perhaps), while still remaining remarkably fresh and original as our newbie PI Tommy Rhodeen descends deeper into a mystery he can't quite understand. Set against the emergence of rock and roll, the book plays like a rockabilly dance in a church basement and I, for one, am happy to sing its praises.

*****5 STARS *****

John Leonard says

A very well done first effort from newcomer Robert Moss. Private investigator Tommy Rhodeen has handled nothing more serious than helping find a judge's missing dog when he is called upon to find the missing stepdaughter of a powerful Memphis businessman.

The plot twists are handled well, and the reader is treated to scenes that take place in historic Memphis nightclubs like the Hideaway, where club goers are dancing to up-and-coming rockabilly musicians like Charlie Feathers and Lloyd McCullough while Rhodeen searches for the missing girl, 17-year-old Helen Williams. Rhodeen even briefly crosses paths with Johnny Cash.

Dream sequences and scenes of violence are also handled with finesse. The title may be "Descending Memphis," but Rhodeen descends into hell when he gets lost in the backstreets of Nashville, where amputees push carts along the pavement and battered prostitutes hide their bruises as best they can under thick makeup.

The musical subplots were especially satisfying. Moss himself was a key figure in the Washington, D.C. hardcore punk rock scene of the 1980s. Here he shows that his musical interests extend far beyond that subculture. I look forward to his next effort.

Jason Dougherty says

I couldn't resist a story that promised an action-packed noir detective thrill-ride mixed with Rock 'n' Roll. Robert Moss certainly did not let me down!

Memphis circa 1956 and its melting pot of people, cultures and musical styles is our backdrop for this story. Mr. Moss paints the scenery with vivid yet concise language; you can feel the sticky summer sweat on your neck, smell the fried chicken dinner in the kitchen, and hear the pulse-pounding drums and lightning guitar riffs up on the stage. Moss kept me engaged, as his prose is often short and clever. The chapters had the pace of a 50's rock song...brief but powerful, full of action and emotion, and certainly nothing wasted. The sentences teemed with the energy of rockabilly, and at times ached like the blues. But at the heart of it all was Rock 'n' Roll in its early, rough, violent stages. Through his choice of words, Moss reflects this time in the music's history, and the story is that much richer because of it.

Our main character, Tommy Rhodeen, is rough around the edges, much like the music found in the bars, clubs, and juke joints of his city. I found it easy to relate to a character like Rhodeen, especially since music

has played such a significant part in my life. Like most musicians, it has taken Rhodeen a bit longer to figure out what he wants to do with his life. Yes, he is a private-eye, of sorts, and it's this profession that leads him to encounter the expected villains, henchmen, crooked cops, dirty politicians, and plenty of dead bodies. But it's his love of music that personally drives him to do the things he does.

Kudos to Robert Moss. Everything about this book is a rewarding experience; the language, the characters, and the plethora of musical references. Even the book's eye-catchingly effective cover design by Steve Donatelli is a treat. But be warned! The twists and turns come fast, and often from the least expected places. It's a page-turner that you are not going to want to put down!

David says

Not sure I would like this, but was happily surprised. I was curious about it because the author is friends-of-friends from back in DC, and here he was writing genre fiction set in a time before he was born. If you like some early rock'n'roll history along with your southern noir mystery, this is the book for you. That is not a combo that I was on the lookout for, and yet I was quite taken with this particular story. But who can resist off-beat but appealing characters, good writing, and well-paced plot? Unlike most first novels, the end was not a let-down. And enough was left open to make me hope for sequels, which is saying a lot given the number of books on my to-read list (and the huge stack of mystery novels in my living room that has not even made it onto my to-read list). The book seemed positively cinematic to me, that is, it felt like a movie unspooling in my head. That's a compliment, but also a warning if that's not your cup of tea. Wouldn't be at all surprised if someone made a movie of this, so we can all talk about it when that happens.

Ranjit says

Moss's excellent debut works as detective fiction, Memphis 1956 rock & roll chronicle, and coming-of-age novel. Narrator-protagonist Tommy Rhodeen is a compelling character, similar to some George Pelecanos protagonists, who works as a low-rung private investigator but whose real passion is for his city's music scene. The setting and dialogue moves from Memphis's upper class to white working class to criminal class to African Americans without missing a beat. Moss clearly loves Memphis's early rock & roll scene as much as his character does, and I came away with a number of obscure artists and songs to check out. For example, Ruth Brown's "You better mend your ways or I'm gonna end your days."

Alain Burrese says

"Descending Memphis" by Robert Moss isn't the kind of novel I've been accustomed to reading lately. Having loaded up on Tom Clancy, Brad Thor, Lee Child, Brad Taylor and the like, I decided to venture out and work in some different genres into my fiction reading. While I'll admit that I still prefer the action packed military themed novels, "Descending Memphis" was well written, interesting, and enjoyable.

The story takes place in Memphis during the 1950s where small-time private eye, Tommy Rhodeen, lands

the biggest case of his career. What seems simple enough, especially for the bigger pay day, turns out to be anything but. Told in a first person narrative that really works with this genre and story, the tale weaves a web between love, race, music, right, and wrong.

I enjoyed how Moss developed his characters, which were by no means two-dimensional. Lines were blurred, and there were twists and turns I didn't expect. And while I didn't particularly "like" the ending, it was satisfying and concluded this story in a meaningful way. Yet, the adventures of Rhodeen are far from over, and I can easily see this become a long lived series of novels.

It's obvious that Moss has an abundance of knowledge of the area and the music scene of the time he writes about. It brings a fresh authenticity to the story, and made me wonder just how much was fact and how much fiction. If you are looking for a well written first person P.I. novel, "Descending Memphis" will be right up your alley.
