



Savage Night

Jim Thompson

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Jake Winroy had no looks, no education, and little else before he'd worked his way to the top of a million-dollar-a-month horse-betting ring. But when the state's latched onto his game, the feds take a bite and the lawyer fees eat away at the rest, all Jake's got left is the bottle and a beautiful wife whose every word is ugly.

Jake's to be the top witness in a major case against organized crime--if he hasn't already kicked the bucket before the trial has its day in court. But an enigmatic mafioso known only as The Man has a plan to make dead certain Jake never gets the chance to testify.

The Man's hired Charlie "Little" Bigger, a hit man barely five feet tall, to infiltrate the Winroy residence as a tenant and murder Winroy in cold blood. To Little, it seems like the easiest job on Earth. Until he lays eyes on the beautiful and dangerous Fay and the Winroy's young housemaid Ruth, a woman as sensual as she is vulnerable. SAVAGE NIGHT is Jim Thompson at his most unpredictable and deeply suspenseful, in a claustrophobic thriller of one man's fractured mind.

Savage Night Details

Date : Published August 5th 2014 by Mulholland Books (first published 1953)

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Author : Jim Thompson

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From Reader Review *Savage Night* for online ebook

Guy Portman says

A shadowy crime boss known as 'The Man' sends contract killer Carl Bigelow to a small town, on a mission to kill a man, by the name of Jake Winroy. Jake is a key witness in a forthcoming court case. Carl, whose ruse is that he has come to study at a language school, finds lodgings with Jake's family, and takes a part-time job at a bakery.

Matters start to go awry for the diminutive, doomed hit man, when he first arouses the suspicion of the town's sheriff, and later goes on to have an affair with both Jake's wife, and Fay, the disabled housekeeper. Events eventually culminate in an unpredictable end.

Protagonist Carl is a paranoid, pensive and perplexing character, who suffers poor health, and is convinced that he is disintegrating - he often comments that there is not much of him left. Acutely aware of his weaknesses, Carl is attracted to ugliness, as he sees himself reflected in it.

Savage Night is a suspenseful crime novel about a vulnerable narrator, who is both a victim and perpetrator, that explores the ugly side of the human condition. This is a nihilistic and violent book that utilises Jim Thompson's trademark stark, pulp prose style.

Thomas says

Great writing marred by discursive and inexplicable subplots, problems with the overall story structure, much too slow a pace, and a murky ending that I found totally incomprehensible. Stylistically, it's great at times, but there are just too many logic problems and weird characterization glitches for me to really think it was a good book. However, there are a few passages that should be textbook examples of building suspense.

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

Well, well, well, guess who's from Oklahoma?? Yes, Garth Brooks. Sigh, and Toby Keith. Naturally, Larry Clark. And, ya know, Jim Thompson. Was my point. I should've known that a man with such a rotten view of humanity came from the birthplace of so many rotten things, including my own rotten view of humanity.

No surprise, this book is rotten, though occasionally quite funny. It's the story of a "nice, young" man named Carl Bigelow who shows up in a small college town mid-semester in order to audit courses, arousing suspicion when he opts to rent a room from a notorious mafia turncoat. Since he's telling the story, I wouldn't be a snot-nosed little spoiler punk to tell you when he takes his makeup off (contacts and false teeth), he's a frightening, scuzzy, wanted contract killer. Under threat of death if he fails, he proceeds to plan a murder made to look like an accident. His dick gets in the way, like they do, and complicated things get even more complicated. Like they do. Not one, but two ladies pull at his loyalties, and his paranoia swells as he becomes more and more convinced that someone, everyone? works for the mob boss who forcefully hired him, and is spying, sabotaging, planning his death. Did I mention he has tuberculosis? Yeah, Carl's life is pretty suck right now, and he can't even sex it away. Carnage ensues.

Lessons: Before you kiss a man, pull at his front teeth to make sure they don't come out. Check the doors of walk-in freezers to ensure they have emergency exit buttons. Even if you think it's sexy to plan a man's murder with his wife as your accomplice, consider for a moment what else that situation might imply about her. Witness Protection exists for a reason. If the mob wants to murder you, don't wander the streets of your hometown, alone and blackout-drunk every night. Avoid Oklahoma. And most importantly, always compliment old ladies on their funny hats. Why? Because it's sweet and it makes them feel good, jerk.

Carla Remy says

I hesitate between a 4 or a 5 star rating. It was not flawed. It was masterful. But did I love it? Hmm. It started out with a classic noir plot but the details were so interesting and the writing was so remarkable, then it veered into the totally unpredictable. Then it just kept veering.

Steven says

Deranged existentialist noir filtered through an unreliable first-person narrator who is a schizophrenic hit man with tuberculosis. Is the novel flawed or genius? Hard to say, probably both. First time through I struggled a bit with the pacing because some of the scenes appear filler and move slow and the dialog is full of dashes and ellipses and stuttered words. By the end, wow. Immediately reread it and then again. Those filler scenes are packed full of clues and edginess that only become apparent later as the story winds down and the narrator unravels. A pulp noir with grotesque and carnivalesque styling. Thompson is in a class by himself when it comes to unreliable narrators.

Greg says

BOOK 71: Mid-20th Century North American Crime Readathon - Round 2

HOOK=4 stars: "The Man" is going to pay our narrator [Carl] \$30,000 to do a job. Thompson doesn't clue us in to the nature of the job at first, and neither does he tell us the name of the person at the bad end of said job. But by the 4th page, Thompson does tell us a murder must be completed via a method that doesn't look like murder. Gotta keep reading!

PACE=4: A real page-turner, as expected from this genre.

PLOT=3: Carl doesn't understand much about the hit he is about to make. Is Carl the only hitman? Or is Carl going to be the victim? Thompson puts a number of possible plot lines into the readers head. It's as if the author, half through the novel, hasn't yet fully outlined the story and is leaving himself open to interesting possibilities. The final pages are great, but did they come to Thompson in a dream the night before he typed the final pages?

CHARACTERS=4: Our narrator, Carl, is about 5 feet tall, is very ill, and often vomits. He is on the repulsive side and readers realize he is an unreliable narrator as he brags about all the ladies in line for him. He is memorable, completely unreliable as a narrator and he is the only character I could remember the name of upon finishing the book. Then there is a lady possessing a shortened leg and a baby foot, thus moves on one leg and one knee. Very unusual. Above an average cast.

ATMOSPHERE/PLACE=4: I thought this great: a group of characters stay through Sunday School and

Church and by the time Church ends, Carl had figured out the plan to kill the victim. The term 'church' is used correctly as a substitute for "church service" that includes a sermon, singing, passing the plate for \$\$\$ collection, etc. And it's in church the murder method is ironically revealed. A signature Thompson oddity. There is a boardinghouse and a bakery that could be any place. But then, oh, there is the cabin in the forest....not to mention a farm raising "the more interesting portions of the female anatomy." That begs for further explanations, but Thompson leaves it at that. An atmosphere of odd hangs all over this book. But the atmosphere doesn't seem to be connected to the plot.

SUMMARY: My average rating is 3.8. Nice opening hook, solid and fast read, a very odd cast and interesting atmosphere. There is a lot of fascinating things going here, but for me the plot doesn't play logically.

The Killer Inside Me - 1952 - 3.6

Savage Night - 1953 - 3.8

Jim Thompson Average Rating - 3.7

Lee Foust says

Despite a varied cast of wacky characters and a tense situation, this is, sadly, not Thompson's best. His books, even when works of startling nihilistic genius, always have a little something of the American cartoonish about them. This one had a bit too much of that and not quite enough of the existential angst that makes for his best character portraits, those pulp novels in which his losers, anti-heroes, alcoholics, and psychopaths wind down their lonely and alienated roads of fate to murder, madness, and oblivion.

David says

From one perspective, *Savage Night* is fairly pedestrian noir. A mob assassin, Charlie Bigger, insinuates himself into a small town as part of his plan for killing a witness in an upcoming trial. This plan, of course, proves to be unnecessarily complicated, as the conventions of noir sometimes require. So far, nothing memorable. But Jim Thompson adds to the mix a startling grotesquerie that turns *Savage Night* into something altogether new in the noir vein. I will say nothing more about this, as *Savage Night* should not be experienced by summary, but I will note that it is easy to imagine Flannery O'Connor learning a few of her tricks from Jim Thompson.

First reading: circa 2006

Second reading: 17 September 2010

Dan Schwent says

[with one normal leg and one stumpy one with a baby foot (hide spoiler)]

Dave says

simply the greatest psycho noir novel written. Carl Bigelow, the self-delusional hit man, is a brilliant

creation, as he's literally disintegrating throughout the novel. The ending is devastating. I love Jim Thompson's books, and this is my favorite.

Dan says

Best last two pages ever.

Corinna Bechko says

There's nobody who writes like Jim Thompson, and that's the truth. There are crazy things in this book, and if you keep reading, they keep getting crazier. Is it one long metaphor? Is it psychological horror? Is it a comment on the American dream? I'd hazard that the answer is yes, but it's also one hell of a read.

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

"Sure there's a hell..." I could hear him saying it now, now as I lay here in bed with her breath in my face, and her body squashed against me..."it is the drab desert where the sun shines neither warmth nor light and Habit force-feeds senile Desire. It is the place where mortal Want dwells with immortal Necessity, and the night becomes hideous with groans of one and the shrieks of the other. Yes, there is a hell, my boy, and you do not have to dig for it..."

Thompson plumbs the depths of mundane hell in this stark, bizarre and dark novel. Does it succeed, for all its excesses? All I can say is, read it in a well-lit place, surrounded by people you love and trust.

Ian says

This is one of my favorite pulp crime novels. Jim Thompson is a master at pedestrian dialogue in the first person structure (see also the *Killer Inside Me* and *After Dark My Sweet*), especially in this novel. The narrative is a strange journey into a surreal and maddening hell. It is strange to see some of the reviews cite the book as being boring, and typical noir fair, this book is anything but. From the description of Carl's journey through Grand Central Station where he actually hits a woman with a child in the breast to the flash back of him being picked up by the strange porn writer who talks about growing the better parts of the female anatomy on his farm. There's sex, booze, weird sex on booze and an ever encroaching sense of dread that hangs like a hallucination over the narrators head. Absolutely one of my favorite American crime novels by one the best crime writers.

brian says

kind of the batshit version of cain, hammett, & chandler. sluggishly paced, schematic, w/o much true conflict

-- flawed, for sure, but elevated by the vagina farm, all those damn goats, a femme fatale on crutches with a baby foot jutting out of her knee, and those transcendent last few pages. 3.7 rounded down b/c i'm mean.
