

The Death and Life of Bobby Z

Don Winslow

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When Tim Kearney draws a license plate across the throat of a Hell's Angel, he's pretty much a dead man. It's his third crime and, according to California law, that gives him "life without the possibility of parole." Killing a Hell's Angel also makes him a dead man on any prison yard in California. That's when the DEA makes Kearney an offer: impersonate the late, legendary dope smuggler Bobby Z so that the agency can trade him to Don Huertero -- northern Mexico's drug kingpin -- for a captured DEA agent. Tim Kearney bears an uncanny resemblance to Bobby Z, and, with some training, he might be able to pass.

Or not. But, really, what choice does he have?

So, he's off to a compound in the middle of a desert that's been designed by Huertero's number-two man to look like the Arab fort in his favorite movie, **Beau Jeste** ("The Santa Fe thing had been done to death.") Kearney's surprised when he meets Bobby Z's old flame, Elizabeth, who was never mentioned in his training, and her son, who she claims belongs to him. It's a short vacation by the pool before Kearney's on the run from drug lords, bikers, Indians, and cops ... and the kid's along for the ride. Some of the pursuers want Bobby Z, and some want the considerably less legendary Tim K. Whether he pulls it off, whether he can keep the kid and the girl and his life, makes for a hilarious, fast-paced, and truly touching novel.

The Death and Life of Bobby Z Details

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Author : Don Winslow

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From Reader Review The Death and Life of Bobby Z for online ebook

John says

After reading Winslow's Dawn Patrol and Savages, anything that this author writes has my attention. It was written in 97 and probably was at a earlier period in his career. Definitely a fun read, but not quite up to the realism of the former two books mentioned.

The plot device is a familiar rehash of a three time loser in prison who is offered his freedom to impersonate a big time drug dealer who has supposedly died. The dialogue is filled with the right blend of racism and street sense to make for the good and realistic part of the read. The sex is not too bad either, but somehow the book never rises above the level of an improbable plot. It doesn't help my sense of realism to have been out in the Anza desert at least once a month (except the summer). Also, the mountain lodge is a place that we take a break each week while mountain biking. I shouldn't hold that against a fiction author, but oh well!

Martin Stanley says

Fast paced entertaining thriller involving mistaken identity, double- and triple-crosses, and a high body count. It has a compelling and likeable 'loser' protagonist and a bunch of detestable villains. Top notch entertainment.

Leon Aldrich says

It is obvious to me Don Winslow has far too many muses flitting around his shoulders. Come one Don, leave some good stories for others to tell. You shouldn't get all the glory.

Paul Nelson says

I listened to the audio version of The Death and the Life of Bobby Z mainly just to get a feel for the author before I tackle the considerably heftier The Power of the Dog. This book was of course turned into the film of the same name starring the late Paul Walker, so it's always interesting to compare the two.

Currently serving a life sentence without parole, decorated Gulf War veteran Tim Kearney gets a poisoned chalice of an offer from the DEA to impersonate the notorious and now dead drug smuggler Bobby Zacharias and to be honest, it's not the deal of a lifetime.

Freedom is freedom though and having just slashed the throat of a Hell's Angel wrecking ball, whatever's in store for him on the outside is going to be a damn site more preferential to the waves of revenge heading his way.

The deal, he's about to be exchanged for the captured DEA agent Arthur Moreno and given to Don Huertero,

a Mexican druglord and yeah, it doesn't sound like an monumentally rejoiceful moment for our hero and token loser.

And it doesn't take long for him to get right in the middle of a seriously fucked up situation, snatched at gunpoint, held prisoner in the desert, waiting for the Don. Luckily though he's a US Marine, the greatest soldiers on the planet and we then step into the realms of predictability with an escape, tracked by Indians, loads of killing etc.

Our hero then actually comes into the role of Bobby Z with a bit of a flourish but unfortunately there's a shit load of baggage that comes with it and a lot of people wanting to end his life.

The only thing to set this apart from other stories of similar persuasion was the rescue of a kid, the real Bobby Z's son, which sort of stopped the story going dark and dirty. There's some snippets of humour in there amidst the betrayals and gunfire. All told the narration was good, the story and plot were good, characters were ok if not a bit cliché and that summed it up for me, just sort of OK.

Also posted at <http://paulnelson.booklikes.com/post/...>

David Baldwin says

A preposterous story excitingly told.

Craig Pittman says

A fun, fizzy thriller that starts off at a gallop and rarely lets up the pace. Tim Kearney, a decorated Marine with a serious impulse control problem, is serving some serious prison time when he kills a biker who'd threatened him. Now he's facing certain death inside prison from the biker's pals. So a DEA agent offers him a deal: Impersonate a legendary drug dealer whom he resembles, enabling the DEA to trade him to a Mexican drug lord in exchange for a captured DEA agent. After that he's free to go.

But the exchange goes horribly awry and Kearney, in the guise of uber-cool California surfing/pot-dealing legend Bobby Z, winds up on the run through the Mexican desert with Bobby Z's six-year-old son in tow.

The writing is sharp and funny as ever with Winslow's work, and the relationship between Kearney and little Kit is nicely rendered. There are some interesting twists to the plot as more and more bad guys join the hunt for Kearney/Z, sometimes tripping over (and killing) each other.

The biggest weakness in the book is the lead female character, a woman named Elizabeth who prefers to be called a "courtesan" rather than what she really is. As in his deeper, longer drug-dealer novel "The Power of the Dog," she serves little purpose except for a dash of exposition and a lot of slobbery sex writing. She doesn't even serve as a fulcrum for the plot, as in the sleeker, more violent thriller "Savages." Now that I've read a lot of Winslow's thrillers, I have to say that his strongest female character is the female deputy in "California Fire & Life," and I surely wish he'd try writing a book where the main female character at least shares the heavy lifting with the macho man lead.

But maybe I'm thinking too hard about a book that doesn't really require you to do more than just grab hold and hang on tight until the last loop-de-loop.

Tfitoby says

Losers don't get dreams, losers have to settle for real life

And Tim Kearney is your quintessential loser in Don Winslow's relentless, fast-paced noir thriller.

Bobby Z is a Laguna Beach legend; surfer, drug dealer, all round cool guy and as it happens has a doppelganger in three time felon and dishonourably discharged marine Tim Kearney. DEA agents want to utilise Kearney's looks to fool a Mexican drug cartel but nothing goes to plan for anyone in the ensuing cross country flight/blood bath.

With Bobby Z Winslow takes some typical genre tropes of the classic film noir period, merged them with some classic hard-boiled prose and updated the whole lot for 21st century readers. His plotting is so brilliantly convoluted and reliant on many a *deus ex machina* that Chandler himself would be proud of and his characters so wildly improbably that true fans of the genre are guaranteed to revel in their behaviour. The speed at which the narrative is developed is phenomenal, this is highlighted several times as Tim keeps taking time out to breath, calm down, think things through, whilst in lesser works this might serve to actually slow the novel down; in this case it merely drives the plot onwards even more relentlessly, in a similar style to Duane Swierczynski's breakneck pace.

Winslow makes a habit of all of this, you can pick up any one of his books and find the same enthusiasm for and appreciation of his genre roots, which readers reactions cannot help but reflect. I challenge anyone to read something as unashamedly giddy as a Winslow novel and not be incredibly happy that they are sharing the authors delight.

The content is admittedly dark and gruesome at times but this balances out with many light hearted moments distributed liberally throughout the story and a relationship between Bobby Z and a six year old boy that works as a wonderful Thelma & Louise type buddy journey, a vehicle for growth in the protagonist and a chance to lighten the mood at just the right moments with some charming observations from the author.

Winslow's/Kearney's voice in this one was incredibly reminiscent of Huston's/Web's in *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death*; these likeable loser characters are both relatively normal people thrust in to extraordinary situations and dealing with them in a manner that suits their well written background stories, the kind of believability that you just don't find in your typical populous unit-shifting genre fare. Just one more reason why both these authors are at the very forefront of modern noir writing.

They made a movie of this, it stars Paul Walker and Morpheus. I'm scared to watch it. I just can't imagine anybody having read this wonderful novel, understood its intentions and then thought to themselves that PAUL WALKER!!!!!! could be Tim Kearney. Sure the guy is supposed to be a bit of a surfer but not a wooden piece of wood with no range like the awful Walker is in every movie he is ever in. Sadly it looks as though it will be yet another notch in the disaster column for Don Winslow movie adaptations.

Piker7977 says

Lifelong loser Tim Kearney looks an awful like legendary drug smuggler Bobby Z. Tim has temper, a tough luck streak, absolutely nothing going for him, and crosshairs on his head. Bobby Z is laid back, cool, and tough. The DEA needs Tim to act as an imposter for a prisoner exchange with a powerful cartel. A la *Kegemusha*. Chaos descends upon the exchange and Tim must flee as the cool Bobby Z.

After being mildly disappointed with *Savages* and blown away by *Power of the Dog*, I wasn't sure what to think of Winslow. I went into Bobby Z with low expectations figuring that *Power of the Dog* was perhaps a one hit wonder. I was wrong. Winslow has got some chops. He combines cool characters with hip prose. His unconventional style makes the pages fly as the reader becomes engrossed in Bobby Z's survival on the run. At times Bobby Z feels like it was written for frat boys who like to say "like" and "Bro Chi Minh" but it dawned on me that this is part of Winslow's message. Some of the bad guys are yuppies and too cool for school. These characters do not get as many pages as the flawed main character or a shady-assed DEA agent. For me, Winslow is mocking society by saying these douchebags may run the show for a while but will fold like hot laundry when confronted by outside forces like the Hell's Angels or two bit convicts.

Like *Power of the Dog*, Bobby Z has a spiritual side to it. *Power of the Dog* focused on losing faith whereas Bobby Z deals with prophecy and salvation. Witnessing Tim's transformation, along with Bobby Z's, shapes the narrative and forces the reader to sympathize. These sort of antiheroes are the best to read about.

If you're looking for some clever writing and thrilling action, look no further. Bobby Z will scratch the itch for crime enthusiasts who appreciate new voices and those who enjoy classic formulas.

Joyce says

This was the 2nd book I've read by Don Winslow and I'm already thinking about what book of his to read next! His books are just so much fun to read, with crazy plots, wild characters, lots of action, suspense and violence, but with just enough humor to make light of the "heavy" and the "dark".

In this story, a small town criminal, Tim Kearney, gets a life sentence for slitting the throat of a Hell's Angel, while in jail. The DEA makes Tim an offer to impersonate a well known drug smuggler, known as Bobby Z, so that the DEA can trade Tim for DEA agent who's been captured by a major Mexican drug king. So Tim accepts the offer and you'll have to read the book to find out anything else. Believe me, the plot unfolds at record speed with cops, robbers, indians, women, kids, bikers, and even a mystic! To top it all off is Don Winslow's writing. Without it, this would just be one of the thousands of books out there that incorporate all these things. But Winslow's writing is what makes this a one-of-a-kind great novel.

Lance Charnes says

The Death and Life of Bobby Z is the book that started Don Winslow on his "drugs in Laguna" series, which isn't actually a *series* as much as an attitude and state of mind that led eventually to *Savages* and its prequel.

Tim Kearney is a three-time loser who gets fished out of a certain-death trip back to prison by a DEA agent who gives him an offer he can't refuse: impersonate legendary Laguna Beach dope dealer Bobby Z and let himself get traded to a Mexican drug cartel in exchange for a kidnapped DEA agent. I probably don't have to

mention that things go horribly wrong, and eventually much of both sides of the law in Southern California want Tim dead.

Bobby Z seems to be the first appearance of what has now become the “Don Winslow voice” – crazy, slangy, attitudinal, and profane. His previous efforts (the Neal Carey mysteries) appear to be much more conventional and comparatively sedate. The characters change names but have become standards in this “series” – the loser hero, the cool-girl goddess, the psychotic killers, the megawealthy dope dealers, the massively bent cops. Here they’re in their prototype form, a little rough around the edges but still entertaining. Serial screwup though he may be, Tim works out as a pretty okay guy to hang with. The dialog (external and internal) is on the mark, the settings filled in enough to picture in the film version. The prose goes down easy and fast.

As you’d expect for the start of a new adventure, not everything goes together as well as it will down the road. Here the problem is mostly one of plotting, in that too much of it hinges on coincidence or dumb luck. Tim tends to catch all the breaks and the bad guys hardly any, which can get annoying after a while. Also, Winslow hadn’t yet started imbuing his supporting characters with the same level of humanity as his lead; probably the most vivid secondary player is a six-year-old boy.

Winslow had six novels under his belt when he wrote *Bobby Z*, but with it he radically changes not only his style but milieu (both in fiction and in fact; he moved from New York to California before he wrote it). That’s a hard trick to pull off in any context, and it seems almost churlish to fault him for bobbling it. I’d give this three and a half if we had half-stars, but we don’t, so I’m rounding down to three in fairness to the later works. If you haven’t read Winslow before, start with *Savages* or *Dawn Patrol* and backtrack; if you have, then go for it and see where those other books came from.

Jessica says

Winslow sets up an interesting premise from the start, and stuffing the book full of crazy characters puts me in mind of what might have happened had Elmore Leonard and Christopher Moore collaborated on a SoCal story. Funny, thrilling, and wild, but with a slightly gooey center for the saps in all of us.

Johnny says

Big, goofy fun. Silly and violent. This book hits the ground running and never lets up. To the point of complete and utter ridiculousness, but still a stunning achievement in terms of just pace.

I'm sure if I looked at the blurbs on the back, they would include such words as: "adrenalin" or "whiplash" or "non-stop thrill ride". All of which describe the story.

Ask me in a couple of weeks, and I'll probably remember the smile on my face as I read the book more than the book itself. But I will remember the smile. And that's a credit to the book.

Lee says

This is a fast-paced, action packed, funny read...with even time for some touching moments. I can see why this was made into a movie, because it sure had that movie pace. The legend of Bobby Z was a wild ride.

Jake says

It was nice to see that Winslow can write without all chill-bro dudeness that worked so well in the Dawn Patrol books and went so terribly wrong in Savages. There are still some 'like, totally rad' Winslowisms, but he strikes a nice balance in Bobby Z. I really dug it, but I might just be a sucker for the touching Tim/Kit relationship. Winslow is very good at creating characters that you really care about, which helps make memorable stories out of yarns that would otherwise be too light and throwaway. Except in Savages. Everything about that was awful.

WortGestalt says

Der Drogendealer Bobby Z ist eine Legende. Und wie bei Legenden meist üblich, ist er tot. An einem banalen Herzinfarkt gestorben. Bobby Z! An einem Herzinfarkt! Das kann man nur schwer glauben.

Tim Kearney ist keine Legende. Tim Kearney ist mehr der Typ Pechvogel. Ein Kleinganove, der bei einem Einbruch schon mal über einen Rasensprenger stolpert und so der Polizei ihren Job recht leicht macht. Aber Tim Kearney lebt. Und er sieht Bobby Z zum Verwechseln ähnlich.

Die Sache ist nämlich die: DEA-Agent Tad Gruzsa will Bobby Z ausliefern. An ein mexikanisches Drogenkartell. Im Austausch für einen anderen DEA-Agenten. Die wollen Bobby Z aber natürlich lebend. Also schnappt Gruzsa sich Tim Kearney. Der hat gerade richtig Stress im staatlichen Gefängnis St. Quentin, weil er dort Stinkdog, ein Mitglied der Hell's Angels umgelegt hat. Ein klitzekleines Problem mit seiner Impulskontrolle. Tim Kearney hat also eine Mordanklage am Hals. Und einen Haufen wütender Rocker, die ihren Kumpanen rächen wollen. Da erscheint Tim die Aussicht, in die Haut eines toten Drogendealers zu schlüpfen und nach Mexiko zu gehen, gar nicht so verkehrt. Und sind wir einmal ehrlich, er hat auch keine Wahl. Er macht den Deal mit der Drogenbehörde und wird zu Bobby Z.

Und dann geht es richtig rund. Denn nicht alles läuft so, wie Tim sich das dachte. Scheinbar will ihm jeder ans Leder, ihm oder Bobby, was keinen Unterschied mehr macht, Tim hat ja das Nimm-2-Paket gebucht. Also muss er seine und Bobbys Dinge regeln, wobei „Dinge“ einen mexikanischen Drogenboss, eine Rockerbande, noch mehr mexikanische Verbrecher, Bobbys früheren Partner, genannt „Der Mönch“, einen Profikiller, die DEA und einen alten Ranger beeinhaltet. Und offenbar auch Kit, den 6-jährigen Sohn Bobby Zs. Ich kann mich in der Regel nicht großartig für Tiere oder Kinder in dieser Art von Romanen (und auch Filmen) erwärmen, hier hat aber Don Winslow die Dramaturgie in der Hand und damit ist auch das wirklich großartig verbaut. Kit und Tim sind, und entschuldigt diesen Ausdruck im Zusammenhang mit einem Don Winslow-Roman, ehrlich zauberhaft.

Die Stärke dieser Geschichte lag für mich in ihrem Tempo und in ihren Figuren, dazu noch der Stil Winslows, das macht die Sache rund. Der Einstieg ist fix und zackig, die Sprache direkt, auf den ersten Seiten wird die Ausgangssituation zügig erklärt, danach passiert dann einfach, was passieren muss. Bei

manchen Figuren reicht ein Dialog, um den gesamten Charakter zu zeichnen und man weiß als Leser alles über eine Rolle, was nötig ist. Sicher greift Don Winslow dabei das ein oder andere Klischee auf, damit diese unkomplizierte Gestaltung so greifen kann, aber die Figuren wirken derart dynamisch, dass das für mich letztlich keine Rolle spielte. Weil keine Figur sein Klischee nutzt, um sich darauf auszuruhen, man spart sich nur langwierige Biografien, schnappt sich zum Beispiel einen mexikanischen Kartellboss und lässt ihn die ihm zugedachte Rolle ausfüllen. Denn das macht er dann richtig gut und die Story läuft. Nette Überraschungen gibt es dennoch genügend. Die müssen dann nicht zwingend in der Charakterzeichnung liegen. Können es aber.

Was das Tempo betrifft, geht es Schlag auf Schlag, Leiche auf Leiche. Es wird viel gestorben in diesem Buch, bei dieser großen Jagd auf Bobby Z und Tim in Personalunion. Die Verstrickungen, wer warum hinter wem her ist, sind dabei großes Kino. Man könnte kurz innehalten und sich das ganze Schlamassel in Ruhe ansehen, doch selbst bei dem hohen Tempo kommt die teils tragische, teils komische Seite der einzelnen Szenen gut heraus, an anderen Stellen spürt man aber auch immer wieder ernste Töne zwischen den Zeilen, leise, aber vorhanden.

Was Winslow auch sehr großartig inszeniert, ist der Zauber um die Legende Bobby Z und das, was sich dahinter verbirgt. Und es ist auch hier die sehr bekannte, aber irre unterhaltsam erzählte Geschichte von einer Niete, die zum Helden wird, wobei recht schnell klar wird, dass die Niete gar keine Niete ist und das Potential hat, selbst zur Legende zu werden, ja die eigentliche Legende sogar locker in die Tasche zu stecken vermag.

Fazit: Eine sehr coole, temporeiche Interpretation einer Doppelgänger-Geschichte. Die große Jagd auf Bobby Z macht Laune, zerschießt so einige Brustkörbe und hat neben sehr harten auch ein paar zarte Seiten. Schönes, schönes Kino!

Bewertung: 4,56 Punkte = 5 Sterne

Stil: 4/5 | Idee: 5/5 | Umsetzung: 5/5 | Figuren: 5/5 | Plot-Entwicklung: 4/5

Tempo: 5/5 | Tiefe: 4/5 | Komplexität: 4/5 | Lesespaß: 5/5 | = 4,56 Punkte

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