

Saga in the Southwest

Crime caper an impressive debut

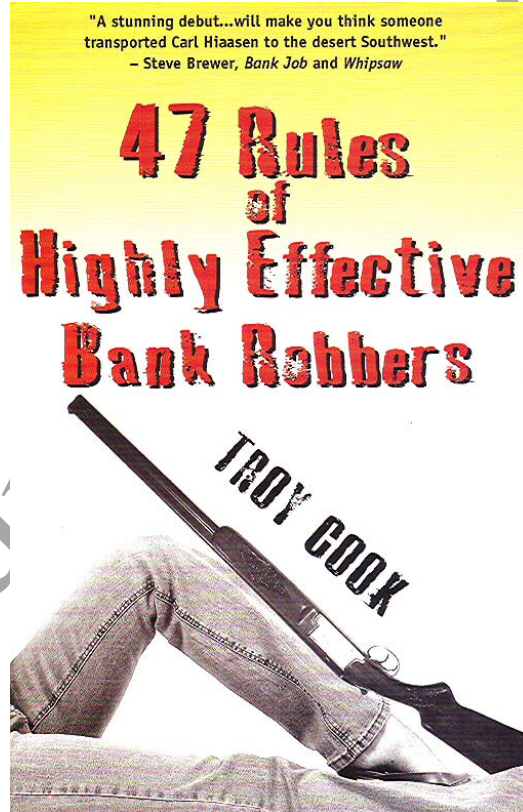
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Just when you think it's all been done before—that there are no more original plots, no fresh characters, no more finely-honed writing out there—along comes a book that proves you dead wrong. This week's pick abandons the gilded elegance of the English drawing-room, forsakes the sophisticated banter of the educated upper classes, and eschews the intellectual challenge of the tightly-woven whodunnit in favor of the simple, straightforward pleasure of an action-oriented comedy-based chase saga set in the sparse and gritty landscape of the American Southwest. Think *Thelma and Louise Meet Abbott and Costello*. If a British mystery-of-manners brings to mind a black-tie dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, this week's pick is more like a hearty serving of macaroni and cheese, enjoyed in front of the TV with your shoes off. And like the latter, it is comfort food for the soul.

Troy Cook

A panelist at the 2006 Crime Writers of Canada annual Bloody Words sleuthfest, *47 Rules* marks Troy Cook's debut as a novelist. But Troy is no stranger to the enter-tainment world: he has worked on more than 80 feature films, sometimes running afoul of murderers, money launderers, and even the Russian Mafia. Having gone through riots and an attempted coup has convinced him that it's safer to write novels.



Troy recently finished his second book, tentatively titled *The One Minute Assassin*, scheduled to be released in Fall of 2007, and is currently at work on a third novel. He is married, with one son and a black cat with no tail.

***47 Rules of Highly Effective
Bank Robbers***
(Capital Crime Press, 2006)

Now in her early twenties, Tara Evans had what some might consider an unusual childhood: trading her Barbie dolls for a Smith and Wesson revolver,

at the age of nine she joined her stepfather Wyatt in a life of crime, robbing banks over much of the American landscape. Wyatt is nothing if not methodical: he has even developed a series of strict guidelines (his “47 rules”) which he instills in his young charge with all the fervor of a born-again Christian. An example: “Rule #1: Your gun is your friend! And one of the best friends you’ll even have, so take good care of him.... But there is only one way, only one God-damned way, to shoot a gun. With your eyes wide OPEN. And no tears, either. You do this right and everyone’s happy. Do it wrong and I’ll be getting stitches at the vet again. If that happens, no one’s happy. I guarantee it.” Tara has become increasingly concerned as Wyatt’s inbred sadism has led to increasing violence on the job; she yearns for a quiet life with a good man. She hopes to end her life of crime soon, though, as the two head for one last big score.

Needless to say, the exploits of this criminal duo have attracted a certain amount of attention. As might be expected, they are being hunted by a couple of FBI agents. Special Agent Stratton is—well, thick, and he owes the fact that he is in charge of the Houston office to his politically-connected father, Senator Stratton. He is assisted (tolerated would be more accurate) by Special Agent Dawkins, an African-American who suffers Stratton’s incessant insults and racial slurs, biding his time and hoping for his moment of revenge.

Complicating things, a couple of Wyatt’s ex-partners have also taken an interest in his bank-robbing spree. Small-time hoods Pete Woods and his Indian sidekick, Bull, are set on relieving the

successful team of their ill-gotten gains. Given that Wyatt’s a psychopath with a long memory, that’s probably a bad move.

Enter Max Williams, a young man of promise, struggling to define himself in the arid culture of small-town America. When he and Tara meet, it is love (and lust) at first sight. Only problem is, Wyatt takes an instant dislike to Max; and that, coupled with Tara’s non-traditional occupation, presents a challenge for Max.

That, and the fact that Max’s dad is the local sheriff.

A rollicking, rowdy romp

A debut novel, *47 Rules of Highly Effective Bank Robbers* won this year’s Silver Evvy Award for Best Novel. Troy’s background is in films, and it shows: the story reads like a film script. With the emphasis on fast-paced action and snappy dialogue, *47 Rules* would make a great summer movie—so it is no surprise that several big companies are currently vying for the film rights. *47 Rules* has strong, original characters, some of them engaging despite their occupations and occasional character flaws. Necessarily violent, with strong language that is always in service of the plot, the story is full of twists and turns, and leavened by Cook’s incessant (and unfailingly dark) humor. It is a rollicking, rowdy romp that will provide hours of enjoyment.

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