

STRAY BULLETS:

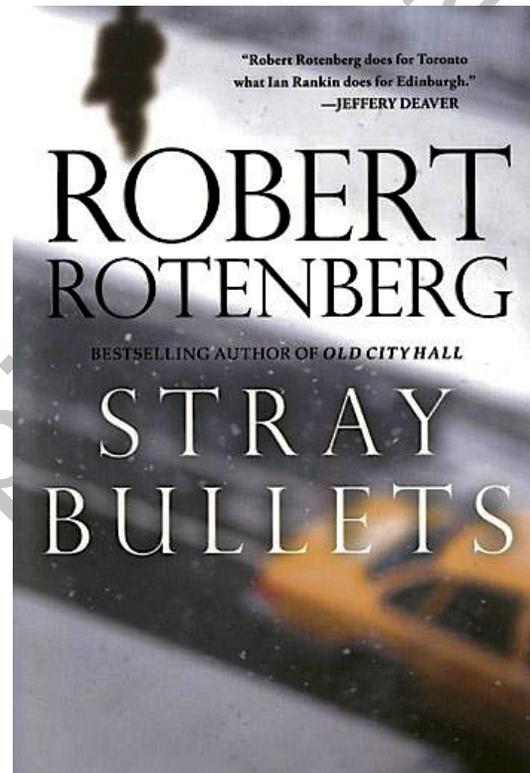
Life imitates art in compelling crime tale

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Last June Canadians received a jarring wake-up call when a gunman opened fire in the food court at Toronto's Eaton Centre, killing one person and leaving another seven wounded, the shooter himself having disappeared into the crowd. The public was shocked: while not all that uncommon in America, such events do not often occur in the placid waters of Canada's cities.

BUT IN A CHILLING CASE of life imitating art, Robert Rotenberg's compelling tale, *Stray Bullets*, was already in the bookstores. It is the tale of a spontaneous shooting at a Toronto Tim Hortons, a firefight that leaves a four-year-old boy dead and a crucial eyewitness, an illegal alien, vanished into the night. In what surely paralleled the Eaton Centre investigation, Ari Greene, the officer in charge of the Tim Hortons shooting struggles to separate the facts of the case from the many conflicting eye-witness accounts. How many shots were fired, and from how many guns? Which witnesses—if any—are reliable? And how to go about tracking down the shooter, who melted into the cold November darkness?



GREENE SOON FINDS that there are people involved in the case with other agendas than solving the crime. He locks horns first with Nancy Parish, a defense attorney for one of the suspects, who's clearly in over her head. Then he must also do battle with Ralph Armitage, an arrogant Crown Attorney who's anxious to exploit the case to further his own career. For his part, Greene only wants to bring a killer to justice and

give the grieving parents of the young victim some small measure of solace. Not as easy as it sounds in the murky world of those who assign little value to human life, and all too much to personal gain.

BUILDING ON THE TIME-TESTED FORMAT of the TV series *Law and Order* (begin with the crime, move to the investigation, conclude with the trial), Robert Rotenberg expertly mines his considerable experience as a Toronto criminal lawyer to spin a story that's

long on colourful detail but carries the reader along effortlessly. With a cast of believable characters cutting across the social spectrum, a layered plot, and convincing dialogue, *Stray Bullets* has all the qualities of a Michael Connolly novel married to a courtroom drama by John Grisham. It's a finely-crafted, engaging tale, and will send readers back to look at Rotenberg's previous works, *Old City Hall* and *The Guilty Plea*.

Originally published in *Reviewing the Evidence*, October, 2012.

Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, and *Type M for Murder*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com



© Jim Napier 2012