

Make 'em laugh

Crime caper lampoons American politics

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

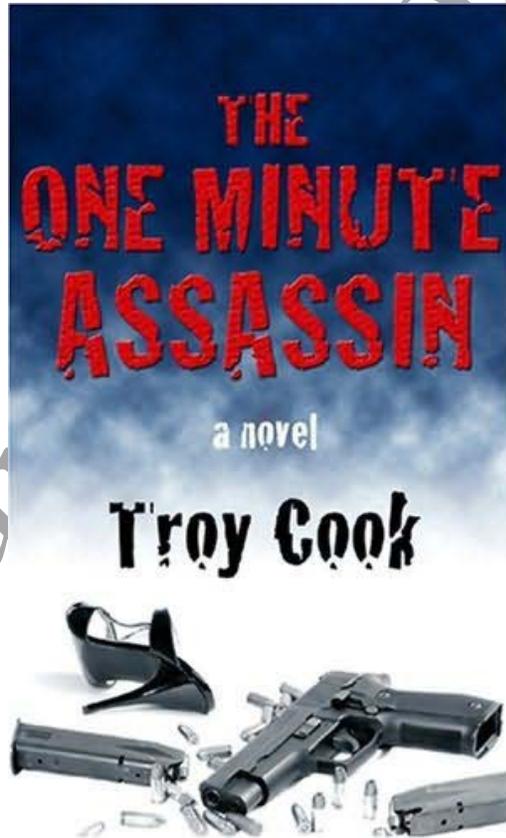
In case anyone hadn't noticed, the Americans are in the throes of yet another election campaign, and those of us north of the border must resign ourselves to enduring a barrage of TV ads, debates, and news coverage nearly equal to the gestational period of an elephant, and not nearly as riveting.

Relief, however, is at hand. As the saying goes, if you can't beat them, join them. Fortuitously, a new crime novel is in bookstores, one which fictionalises the American political process for all it's worth. And unlike the real thing, it's entertaining.

Troy Cook

In October of last year I reviewed Troy Cook's debut novel, *47 Rules of Highly Effective Bank Robbers*. The book was widely acclaimed, garnering multiple awards and earning him a reputation as a writer to watch. His novels are visually graphic, and reflect his background as a filmmaker; he has worked on more than 80 feature films, in the process sometimes running afoul of murderers, money launderers, and even the Russian Mafia. Some of these experiences have made their way into his latest book, *The One Minute Assassin*, which was released in September of this year.

Troy and his wife have one son and a black cat with no tail.



The One Minute Assassin (Capital Crime Press, 2007)

Los Angeles, the la-la land of American politics. A gubernatorial campaign is in full swing, but someone is trying to determine the outcome by means that, even for American politics, are extreme. Several candidates have met mysterious deaths, the latest a former child TV star, Odie Roberts, who fell from a high-rise

window, as luck would have it to land on his own Hollywood star on the pavement below.

Even for California, the candidates are a mixed lot. There are rappers, circus midgets, used car dealers, a loser from a reality TV show, and a man who claims that all the other candidates are aliens trying to take over the state. But the race has narrowed to a few front-runners: they include Michael Sanchez, popular among the hispanic population, Richard Steel, the ambitious president of a pharmaceutical firm, a gangsta rapper named Two Bits, a Hungarian ex-wrestler and “b” movie star named Arnold “The Mountain” Schwarzkov (sound familiar?), and Eleanor Black, the mayor of L.A. Behind the scenes are a couple of hapless, would-be assassins named Barry and Nails, the latter an ex-pro-football player who is heavily into experimental drugs, and a trio of Russian Mafia who want a piece of the political action in California. With such a volatile mix, mayhem is inevitable.

When his sister Eleanor is hospitalized following a car crash, John Black enters the scene. A private investigator who specializes in using unorthodox methods to get deadbeat dads and child abusers to mend their ways, John enlists the help of his partner Harley, a middle-aged Aussie with a penchant for violence. Harley’s threats are usually more than sufficient to persuade recalcitrant fathers to pay their overdue child support, and if threats don’t work, he is more than willing to employ a range of imaginative physical options that convince even the most strong-willed opponents to see the error of their ways.

His domineering mother is a powerful Senator whose nickname is the Barracuda, so it is not surprising that John harbours a deep distrust of all

things political. But with his sister in the hospital John is persuaded by his mother to enter the gubernatorial race himself. His mother has her own agenda, but for John it’s simple: by making himself a target, he hopes to discover who is behind the attacks on his sister.

An action tale with social commentary

The One Minute Assassin is an entertaining poke at the unique (and pathological) world of American politics. Building on the dark humour evidenced in his debut novel, Troy Cook masterfully combines a good action yarn with entertaining social commentary. Tongue planted firmly in cheek, Cook lampoons the bizarre social culture of Southern California, from promiscuous teenagers to scheming wannabe politicians, and still finds time to get in shots at polluting corporations and off-the-wall political platforms, as in the following extract from a televised debate:

Two-bits slammed his fist into the podium. “...In case you dudes don’t remember, the topic was gang violence, so let’s get back to it. I agree with some of Mr. Black’s proposals, which is hard to admit ‘cause he’s a white dude. But he’s missing one giant piece of the puzzle—state-funded target practice for gang members.”

Nails smiled when he heard the audience suck in their breath.

“The biggest problem with gangbangers is that their aim is off. They keep hitting innocent bystanders when they’re aiming for rival colors. If we get them some target practice, they’ll be taking each other out a lot

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quicker and solving our gang violence a lot sooner.”

Nails grunted. Now that’s a ballsy solution.

A worthy sequel to *Forty-Seven Rules*, *The One-Minute Assassin* is a fun read, and a great way to kick off the new year.

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