

# Three for the Road

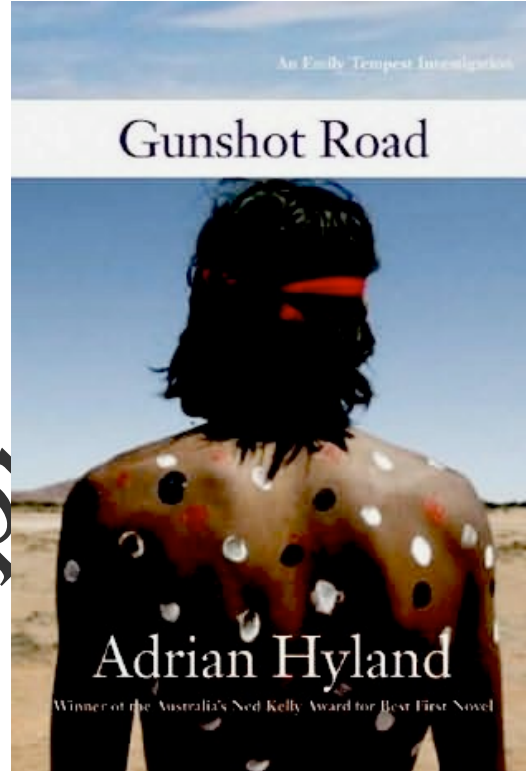
*International novels featuring exotic settings*

*Suspended Sentences*

by Jim Napier

More than a decade ago Annie Proulx's bestselling novel *The Shipping News* garnered both a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award and, along with her equally-successful *Brokeback Mountain*, was made into a compelling and evocative film. Proulx's stories take much of their strength from her skillful use of setting, and in an interview with *Time* magazine she is quoted as saying that "I believe if you get the landscape right the characters will step out of it...The story will come from the landscape."

The authors that form the basis for this week's picks have learned Proulx's lesson well. Each story draws upon a unique setting for much of its power. One is centred in the Australian Outback; another takes place in Capetown, South Africa; the third moves quickly from Los Angeles to Hong Kong. Although they are very different tales, they all immerse readers in a darkly exotic setting far removed from the familiar, heightening the readers' suspense and effortlessly carrying the plot. So indulge in a bit of armchair travelling, with a fervent prayer that your own real-world journeys don't take you where these people have gone.



**Adrian Hyland, *Gunshot Road*  
(Soho Crime, 2010)**

Winner of Australia's Ned Kelly Award for Best First Novel (2007's *Moonlight Downs*), Adrian Hyland has served up a crackerjack tale combining raw, fast-paced action set against the stark landscape of rural Australia. *Gunshot Road* is pure Outback Noir, a gritty sequel set in the Australian boonies, and featuring the weirdest collection of misfits, oddballs and villains this side of an asylum, but apparently not all that unusual in the land of Down Under. Emily Tempest is an Aboriginal woman

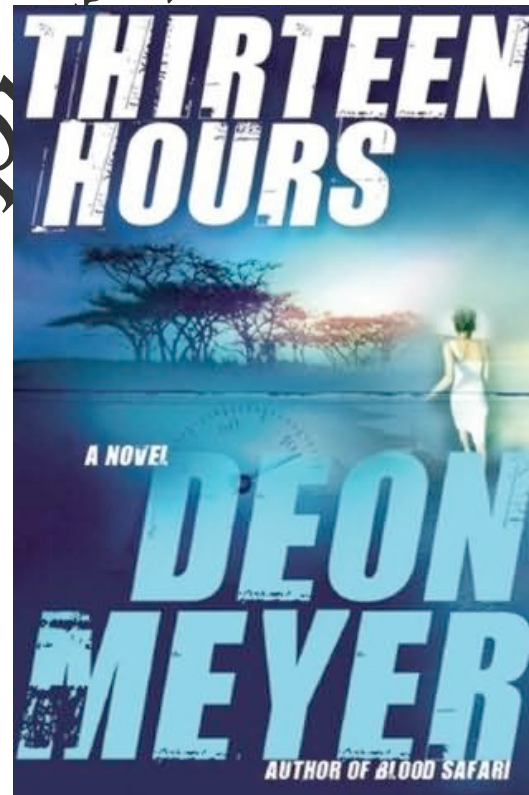
just beginning her career as a Community Police Officer when she is assigned to a team investigating the body of an elderly prospector in a remote village, a geologist's hammer protruding from his skull. The suspect of choice is a cantankerous mate of his, one John Vincent Petherbridge. Nicknamed 'Wireless' due to his nonstop conversational skills, he's admitted to the crime, saying it was due to an argument they'd been having over Xenos's Paradox. Not unreasonably, Tempest has her doubts: a dispute over a long-dead philosopher seemed a stretch as a cause for murder, even in the Australian Outback. But the ranking officer on the case is anxious to wrap things up, and it's clear that Emily must marshal her own resources if she is to pursue things further. Both a rookie and a loner, she soon finds herself in well over her head. If you are contemplating a trip to Down Under, the mayhem that ensues could cause you to seriously revisit your travel plans.

Heavily steeped in aboriginal ritual and beliefs, expertly combined with a fine sense of narrative, *Gunshot Road* is an impressive novel with a strong and original voice. Like the landscape from which it springs, it is long on earthy language and explicit violence, and will appeal to readers in search of a refreshing take on the world of crime fiction. Look for more from this talented author.

**Deon Meyer, *Thirteen Hours*  
(Random House Canada, 2010)**

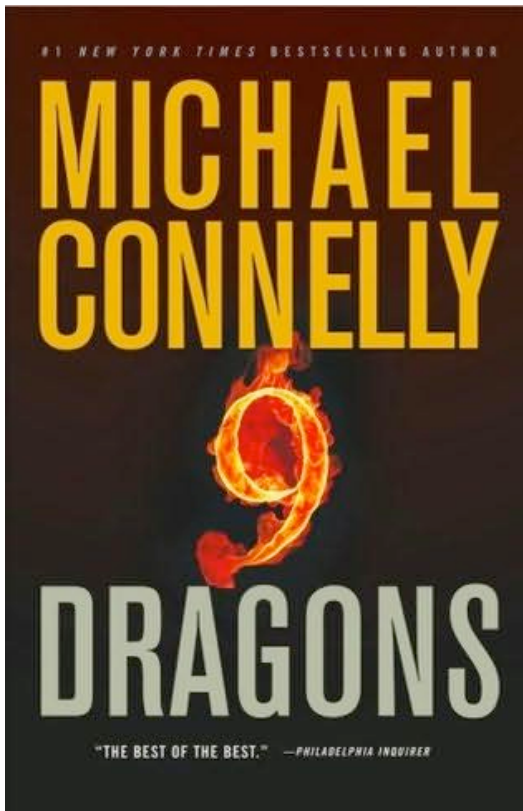
Author Deon Meyer has delivered a taut thriller about a day in the life of South African police detective Benny Griessel and his quest to find Rachel Anderson, a young American backpacker missing in Capetown. Her backpacking friend

murdered in a churchyard, Rachel is on the run from a mixed-race gang, trying desperately to elude both her pursuers and the police, whom she distrusts. Making Benny's job all the more daunting, he is mentoring Inspector Visumuzi Ndabeni, who is nominally in charge of the case; as a black officer leading his first case involving the death of a white girl from an influential foreign family, he is obsessed with getting it right. Added to the mix is another black officer assigned to the hunt for the missing girl: Detective Sergeant Mbali Kalezi has her own agenda, composed of equal parts of race, gender, and personal hostility. It is an explosive combination in the still-caste-ridden culture of urban South Africa.



Meyer is a strong believer in the importance of setting. In *Thirteen Hours* the focus is not on the natural landscape, but on the social setting: the petty rivalries between the various South

African police forces, and the racism between tribal blacks, and between blacks and what are still termed “coloureds” in contemporary South Africa. A fast-paced suspense tale, told from multiple viewpoints, *Thirteen Hours* will hold you in your seat until you finish the book. A fine tale from a rapidly rising star on the crime writing scene.



**Michael Connelly, *Nine Dragons*  
(Little, Brown, 2009)**

Harry Bosch finds that even the sprawling city of Los Angeles will not hold him in this, the fifteenth tale featuring the indefatigable police detective. Life has not been all sweetness and roses for Harry lately: he and his Chinese wife Eleanor have divorced, and she’s moved to Hong Kong, taking their daughter Madeleine with them. Now just past her thirteenth birthday,

Maddie and her father share only a few precious weeks each year.

Responding to a liquor-store shooting in South L.A., Harry recognizes the victim, a Chinese man named John Li. Harry knew the man from years ago: during a riot in the run-down section of the city a younger Bosch had badly needed a cigarette to calm his nerves; Li had given the detective a book of matches, even though his store had been ransacked, his business ruined. Bosch hadn’t forgotten that small act of kindness in the midst of chaos.

The more that he looks at the crime scene, though, the more Bosch is convinced it’s not just another liquor-store holdup. Certain that both the victim’s widow and children are hiding something, when his investigation turns up some Chinese characters and the local cops are dragging their feet, Bosch calls his daughter in Hong Kong. Before long she gives him the information he wants.

Then, ten thousand miles away, Maddie disappears.

Classic Connelly, meticulously plotted and convincingly told, with enough suspense to hold even the casual reader and a twist in the tale that will come as a shock, *Nine Dragons* is one of the best in the already legendary chronicles of Harry Bosch.

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