

# The Cyberlibrarian: Reviews and Views on Current Literature

Welcome to my blog. I am Miriam Downey, the Cyberlibrarian. I am a retired librarian and a lifelong reader. I read and review books in four major genres: fiction, non-fiction, memoir and spiritual. My goal is to relate what I read to my life experience. I read books culled from reviews in The New York Times, The New York Review of Books, Bookmarks, and The New Yorker. I also accept books from authors and publicists. I am having a great time. Hope you will join me on the journey.

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Friday, March 10, 2017

## The Painted Gun

by Bradley Spinelli  
Akashic Books 2017  
267 pages **Noir**

In order to truly appreciate *The Painted Gun* by Bradley Spinelli, you need to be aware of the definition of "noir" fiction. An article in *Huffington Post* suggests that the protagonist in a noir novel is a loser, "as the life that awaits them is certain to be so ugly, so lost and lonely, that they'd be better off just curling up and getting it over with." Another definition of noir fiction says that it is closely related to the "hardboiled" genre except that the protagonist is not a detective, but might be a suspect or a perpetrator. Often the protagonist is self-destructive. One of the other characteristics of the genre is the dark humor that permeates its novels. Spinelli scores on almost every aspect of the noir checklist, and I really enjoyed checking items off the list.



David "Itchy" Crane is an information consultant in 1990s San Francisco. What that means is that he is not really a private detective but someone who helps clients find necessary information. (Remember that this is before you can find every bit of information you need on the Internet.) He is hired by an acquaintance to find a lost young woman named Ashley and is paid handsomely to search for her. What Crane immediately finds out is that she is a painter who only paints one subject—David "Itchy" Crane. Yet Crane has never met her and is freaked out by the intimacy of the paintings. Of course, like most protagonists in noir and hard-boiled fiction, he becomes obsessed with finding her. Along the way to finding her, people end up dead, the CIA is somehow involved, and his journey takes him to Guatemala where he finally is able to resolve the drama.

One reviewer suggests that it would have been easy for Spinelli to slip into cliché as the plot unfolds, but that doesn't happen. Crane, himself, acknowledges that he might be slipping into cliché, but surprisingly he has enough self-awareness to know where he is headed and he embraces it. Here's a favorite line--when Crane finds out that Ashley is painting portraits of him. "The word portraits ran down the back of my neck like stray hairs in a shirt collar after a haircut."

One of the best aspects of *The Painted Gun* is its sense of place. The seedier sides of San Francisco are brought to life with all the expected characters, including some of the informants that Crane had used when he was a newspaper reporter. In the last chapters, Crane goes to Guatemala to finish his mission, and Guatemala comes vividly to life. This part of the novel is a bit of an anachronism. We get a history lesson into Guatemalan politics and bananas as well as a geography lesson. Frankly, I found this to be the most interesting part of the novel, although some reviewers thought the novel faltered a bit there.

*Publishers Weekly* calls *The Painted Gun* a "tricky and delightfully surprising crime novel." They also suggest that Spinelli is a "talent to watch." The book can be read in



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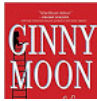
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one or two sittings and is a wonderful diversion. I received it from the publisher, and it came out this week. It was a lot of fun.

Bradley Spinelli website.



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ica: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago



ng Cures: Life Changing Secrets to Reverse the Effects of Aging

Posted by [Miriam Downey](#) at [9:54 AM](#)  
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About Me

[Miriam Downey](#)

Kalamazoo, Michigan

I am the wife of Thell, the mother of 3, the step-mother of 4 and grandmother to 8. Right now our family includes 22 people. I am a theological school-trained, career-long librarian. Having grown up in Minnesota, I am liberal to the core but married to a life-long Republican. We are great together except during political campaigns.

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