

Tonino Benacquista
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Une famille d'Américains s'installe à Cholong-sur-Avre, en Normandie. Fred, le père, se prétend écrivain et prépare un livre sur le Débarquement. Maggie, la mère, est bénévole dans une association caritative et se surpassé dans la préparation des barbecues. Belle, la fille, fait honneur à son prénom. Warren enfin a su se rendre indispensable pour tout et auprès de tous. Une famille apparemment comme les autres, en somme. Une chose est sûre, s'ils emménagent dans votre quartier, fuyez sans vous retourner...

Malavita Details

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Author : Tonino Benacquista

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From Reader Review Malavita for online ebook

Teodora says

It is an interesting book with an inside look at mafia and witness protection programme. I think it deserves a 3.5 to be honest. I wanted to like Fred, but ultimately I didn't and that was probably the authors intention. Whats there to like about a guy whose life was to kill and gain power. Its an easy read and a good one when on holiday. It had a lot more potential but didn't quite live it out for me.

Cassandra says

Die Charaktere sind schräg und konnten mich schon nach kürzester Zeit für sich begeistern. Natürlich hatte ich beim Lesen den Filmcast mit Robert de Niro und Michelle Pfeiffer im Kopf, obwohl ich den Film bislang nicht gesehen habe und das verdoppelte das Lesevergnügen noch einmal. Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm und mit einem Mafiosi als Vater sind Frau und Kinder durchaus mit Vorsicht zu genießen. Interessant wie Sohn Warren in kürzester Zeit zum Mini-Mafiosi mutiert und die gesamte Schülerschar fest im Griff hat.

Erfreut haben mich immer wieder die amüsanten Wendungen und unvorhersehbaren Entwicklungen und Handlungen der Familie Manzoni. Es kommt beim Lesen keine Langeweile auf und das Tempo ist angenehm. Der Autor hat eine gute Menschenkenntnis und versteht es mit Humor, die Charaktere seines Buches, dem Leser näher zu bringen.

Die Handlungen, wenn auch etwas krass, waren immer nachvollziehbar, aber hier geht es nicht um den Streit der Gartenzwerge, sondern darum seine Identität, trotz allen zu wahren und zu überleben. Was bei einem ausgesetzten Kopfgeld von 20 Millionen Dollar mehr als unsicher ist.

Als nicht Mafia-Experte habe ich das Buch in vollen Zügen genießen können.

Positiv:

- Überzeugende Charaktere
- Amüsante Momente
- Interessante Wendungen
- Flotter Schreibstil

Neutral

- ---

Negativ

- ---

Fazit:

Ich kann das Buch allen Lesern empfehlen, die Freude an schwarzem Humor und einer spannenden Geschichte haben.

Patricia Vocab says

Après un excellent départ, les personnages étant affectueusement caricaturés et très bien décrits, l'histoire se perd dans des digressions, trop de détails inutiles et le reste du livre s'étire en longueur. En plus c'est trop concentré sur le personnage principal et délaisse le reste de la famille et leurs gros potential.

Je n'accroche pas trop avec le style d'écriture de l'auteur, car les dialogues sonnent faux. Ca se lit mais l'ensemble manque de consistance. La fin est totalement invraisemblable et en plus c'est même plus drôle.

J'ai eu de mal à me plonger dans ce livre. Même si ce n'est pas mon livre préféré cette comédie autour de la mafia m'a amusée. Mais il manque un peu de fond pour en faire plus qu'un bon divertissement.

Kelsie Beaudoin (The Bookworm) says

I had heard that Malavita was a French comedy about an American mob family. Perhaps it was the fact that the story was translated, or perhaps because I am not French and so do not have the same humor expectations, but I did not think the story was funny at all. Unrealistic, stereotyped characterizations, and exaggerated situations, but not funny.

This story was not as fine combed as I would have liked. There were several instances that I felt kept the story from moving forward. One of these pointless parts was when Giovanni/Fred's nephew comes to visit. Ben really serves no purpose in the story. His arrival causes some irritation, but other than that, there is no reason or relation to the rest of the story.

I give this book a two out of five. While I definitely did not hate the book, I did not like it either. I often found myself skimming because I couldn't take the unnecessary parts any more. I would, however, recommend reading it if you want to see the movie. They only changed a few details in the movie, and I think it accompanies the book very well.

Read more reviews at: <http://readbookwormread.blogspot.com>

Filipa says

Estreou o filme há pouco tempo e o póster chamou-me a atenção (pelos actores que gosto bastante), no entanto não quis ver trailer nenhum, não me quis informar mais.

Vi o poster, achei graça, ficou-me na memória saber que era baseado num livro.

Dias depois surge um passatempo no facebook acerca do livro em que tinha que se escrever uma frase, lá vou eu tentar a minha sorte e... pimbas. Ganhei. Assim que o recebi meti mãos à obra e toca de lê-lo para ver ainda o filme.

Ainda não vi o filme, o livro, está engraçado e não é nada mais do que aquilo que promete, ou seja, uma família disfuncional e ligada à máfia, com todos os problemas inerentes que pertencer à Máfia acarreta.

Gostam de filmes sobre a Máfia? Pois neste livro encontram todos os ingredientes. Perseguições, mortes brutais e... claro, a vendetta.

A família é muito engraçada de se conhecer e tem alguns momentos humorísticos. Ninguém bate bem da tola, é engraçado de se ler por isso mesmo. O título, é bem adequado à história, mas só se percebe o porquê mesmo mesmo no fim. . . Malavita é a cadeia da família. . .

Quem gosta deste género, não pode deixar de ler.

Lisa says

Imagine The Sopranos transplanted to the French countryside....

This thrillingly comic, internationally bestselling Mafia farce is the inspiration for the major motion picture The Family starring Robert De Niro, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Tommy Lee Jones, and produced by Martin Scorsese.

The Blakes are newcomers to a small town in Normandy. Fred is a historian researching the Allied landings, Maggie enjoys charity work, and their kids are looking forward to meeting other teenagers at the local lycée. Or so it seems.

In fact, Fred is really Giovanni Manzoni, an ex-goodfella turned stool pigeon who's been relocated from New Jersey to France by the FBI's witness protection program. He's got a two-million-dollar bounty on his head, but he and his family can't help attracting attention (imagine the Sopranos in Normandy). And when imprisoned mobster Don Mimino gets wind of their location, it's Mafia mayhem à la Josh Bazell's Beat the Reaper, or like The Godfather as if written by Carl Hiaasen. Because while you can take the man out of the Mafia, you can't take the Mafia out of the man.

Funny, fast read and very amusing.

Liliana Pinto says

"Malavita" é um livro completamente diferente do que eu esperava. Esperava um livro repleto de ação e sem coisas muito elaboradas. Mas, Tonino Benacquista, enganou-me bem.

Este é um livro que dá para pensar. Conseguimos entender o que levou Fred a denunciar os seus "amigos" e o que sentiu a família ao ter de mudar de país. É que não foi de cidade, foi de país!

Este não é um livro fácil de ler. Tem poucos diálogos, mas a escrita é compreensível. Dei por mim várias vezes a pensar no quanto difícil é deixar tudo para trás e começar de novo. Sentir todos os dias medo de ser descoberto.

Gostei de ler este livro. Foi uma boa surpresa.

Recomendo.

Catherine says

"Ils prirent possession de la maison au milieu de la nuit."

Best opening line EVER.

In fact, the entire first chapter was one of the best openings I've read.

This is a very fun read, very well written (even the 'illiterate' characters had a strong vocabulary) and I had to reach for my French dictionary every three pages or so. It's not nearly as violent as the film, which I didn't enjoy quite as much, and the ending is much better than depicted in the film.

As an expat living in France, I laughed at many of the anecdote. Especially because the Manzonis are Americans of European descent- they know what good food is and how to entertain a party. I identified myself in their situations many, many times (including getting picked on, and the idolized). It all happened.

The only problem I had with the story was the nostalgia. After so much time living in another land, you adapt. You get flexible and adapt to pretty much any culture in whichever city- especially if you need survival skills, like the Mafia does. The longing for something you can't have fades away, especially if you have your entire family with you. There was a little too much sentimentality and not as much rationality as I imagine the Mafia to have.

But I thoroughly enjoyed the book and the little tidbits from other people's lives that popped in here and there. It made the story sound much more real.

I recommend the book to all those that love a well-written work, those who want to learn good French, expats in France that want a laugh, and in general, everyone who loves a good Mafia book that doesn't pull the heartstrings too much.

Nancy Oakes says

Cholong-sur-Avre in Normandy is the setting of this rather unconventional and darkly humorous tale. The Blake family moves into an old Norman brick-and-stone villa during the middle of the night. They had already lived in France for six years, first in Paris, then on the Cote D'Azur in Cagnes-sur-Mer. There's Fred, the head of the clan, Maggie his wife, and two teenagers, Belle and Warren. Just your typical American family relocating to the French countryside, right? Wrong. Fred is actually Mafioso Giovanni Manzoni from New Jersey, and he and his family are in the witness protection program after he testifies against another crime boss, Mimino. Along with them are a team of FBI men, assigned to them for protection against anyone wanting to claim the huge bounty put on Manzoni's head by Mimino. All of they have to do is lay low, pretend to be a normal family and get on with their lives. But for someone like Fred, or for the rest of the family for that matter, being normal in any sense of the word is impossible.

Benaquista's characters are well drawn. In this particular witness protection incarnation, Fred has decided to tout himself as an author writing about the landing at Normandy, while all the time writing his own memoirs about his life in organized crime. Fred is not a likable person at all and has no redeeming qualities, but he

does have principles: he always takes responsibility for his actions, he wouldn't do anything different over his lifetime if he had it all to do again, and the word he hates most in the world is sorry. Maggie is busy with volunteer work, but hangs out with the FBI team to get the latest on her neighbors, who are under constant surveillance by the feds. Belle, the daughter, is one of those people who makes lemonade with the lemons life has handed her, and Warren has handled the witness protection situation by watching, learning and becoming the mini Godfather-figure of his school.

There are some truly funny moments in this book, especially the story of how a school magazine traveled from France to Thailand to Los Angeles to New York and started a particularly nasty chain of events. That whole little story within a story is laugh-out-loud funny. There's also a great scene where by mistake a local cinema club gets sent the Scorsese film *Goodfellas* instead of the scheduled program of *Some Came Running*, the story of a WWII veteran who returns home. However, As much as I liked this book, I did have a couple of niggling and minor issues with it. First, I kept waiting for the "crime fiction" part to begin, but it never materialized. I might have labeled it more of a "dark comedy" -- there's no central mystery plotline, very little crime and it's really more of a look at the lives and fortunes of this Witness-Protected family while in exile and at times the people guarding them. And this leads me to my second point: when a plumber meets up with an unfortunate incident at the Blake home, how is it that the FBI surveillance team overseeing the Blake family's every move knows nothing about it? And how is that Fred's nephew in the US is allowed to get a call from France when the family is virtually in lockdown? There are a couple of places like this where the storyline falters a bit, creating distractions that really annoyed me at times.

If you're looking for a typical crime fiction novel, I wouldn't start with this one, but the book is actually quite good overall -- more of a fun read than a serious crime read. It has been nominated for this year's International Dagger Award, and at the award's website, the judges have noted that "Crime fiction that makes you chuckle is rare and this is an exceptional example of the species." There's enough satire here to satisfy anyone's snarky and sardonic side, a bit of underworld darkness, and I would most definitely recommend it. And finally, as one cover blurb notes:

Benaquista's story explores what would happen if, say, the Soprano family were to move to Normandy...

and I'd say that's about hit the nail on the head.

Hélène Wilkinson says

L'intrigue est très simple : un mafiosi repenti, qui a balancé bon nombre de ses collègues de la Cosa Nostra se retrouve exilé en Normandie avec sa famille, dans le cadre d'un programme de protection de témoins. Un jour, il tombe sur une vieille machine à écrire et c'est le déclic, il va écrire ses mémoires. Les péripéties de cette famille américaine un peu particulière nous font vivre des moments exquis, avec toute une série de personnages mineurs désopilants.

J'ai un faible pour le jeune cadre dynamique et minable, qui s'effondre en lisant le poème invraisemblable de son fils, ou le président du ciné club de Cholong-sur-Avre ou encore les deux agents du FBI chargés du travail de protection de la famille Manzani au quotidien.

J'ai adoré ce livre. Il est d'abord très drôle, bien sûr, et son humour me paraît assez rare, un mélange de pince-sans-rire, de dérision et de rocambolesque. Le problème de l'humour face à l'immoralité ce pose en

même temps qu'on le savoure : ce livre ne contenait-il pas quand même une apologie de la violence et du banditisme ?

Si, bien sûr, et c'est bien le talent de Tonino Benacquista que de nous offrir un livre qui nous fait rire, réfléchir sur ce qui nous fait rire, puis rire encore, affranchi de toute sensation de honte ou d'inconfort, parce que c'est trop bien vu, senti, dit, écrit.

Grace says

I was very disappointed with this book. The saying that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover is certainly true in this case. On the face of it this sounded exactly like the sort of book that I would enjoy, however the actual execution of the story for me left a lot to be desired and I felt let down.

Chelsea says

This was almost a good book. It had a lot of potential, but it felt a little slow and scattered. The family was in the mob and goes into witness protection. It feels like the father is the main character, but his son's story was almost more interesting to me... though it fizzled out after the middle of the book. The daughter is vapid and boring. The mother doesn't have much of a personality, just does charity work. The end was exciting, but it didn't quite feel like it was worth it. I felt like so much more could have happened, but I just read a few stories of what had happened in their past, and why they'd moved so much... And stories like that aren't as exciting, you know? Since they are background, and not happening right then. Also, not a great title. It kind of makes sense in the end, but still not quite big enough to name the whole book after that one event. It says on the cover it is being made into a movie, so they will probably make it much faster and more dramatic. I didn't hate it, I just expected it to be better from "National Bestseller" and "Soon to be a motion picture."

Susan says

Black comedy, I enjoyed it (read the English version, of course). The ending was a bit over the top for me, but consistent with a Simon Pegg/ Edgar Wright story (though this will be made into a Hollywood movie, no doubt the humour will be lost or wasted).

Quentin Feduchin says

I saw the film. I enjoyed it so much I had to buy the book

Both film and book are quite off beat. You will see and read something rather different from the normal stuff. Not that I'm running down the 'normal stuff', much of it can be pretty good, to both see or read.

The film tends to be a bit Americanised, let's face it the Americans made it so how can it be otherwise. But the story is still quite unusual and all the more pleasurable for it, especially as it's made in France with a lot

of French direction.

The book is obviously 'made' in France, so although translated into English (exceedingly ably) it's really quite refreshing.

Both film and book is black comedy. There are aspects that are really fun to both watch and read. However the way the denouement is handled by the two genre is quite different. If you happen to read the book first you will come to realise why the last third of the film is made differently; it has to be, there is too much detail in the book. On the other hand if you see the film first, be prepared for quite a bit of extra detail in the book for a slightly different though equally enjoyable story line.

Both are highly recommended.

Romie says

Since I can remember, I've always been interested in the mafia, and I have no idea why ^^
I liked the way the story is told, it made me feel like I was "living" the story, like I was part of it, so I can easily say it was an interesting reading experience.

I loved the Blakes, the way they react to normality is first. funny ; second. so unexpected you can't know for sure what they're gonna do before they actually do it.

I really really want to read the sequel now.

4.25

Sophia says

το απ?λαυσα τ?σο πολ?! με ιδια?τερη αδυναμ?α στην περιγραφ? του ταξιδιο? της εφημερ?δας ;)

Andie says

Giovanni Manzoni is a New Jersey mob boss turned stool pigeon for the FBI. His testimony has been responsible for sending dozens of wise guys to jail, including the *capo di tutti capos*, Don Mimino, so naturally, there is a price on his head. It soon becomes apparent that he cannot safely live under the witness protection program in the United States, so his FBI handlers move him to France where we find him living in a small town in Normandy under the name of Fred Blake when the story opens.

Fred is bored and turns to writing his memoirs with hilarious results. His wife is trying to find a place of meaning in the small community and the children are navigating the social structure at the local *lycee*. Meanwhile the FBI handlers are camped out across the street keeping an eye on all the neighbors and trying to keep Fred and his family alive.

This is harder to do than one would think, and when, through a bizarre chain of events, Don Mimino figures out where they are living, it sets off a chain of events that leads to Mafia mayhem at its finest.

This book is a quick, fun read on the order of Carl Hiaasen and has been made into a movie called "The

Family" starring Robert DeNiro (ho else now that Jame Gandofini is dead?).

Delphine Tran says

une lecture sympathique mais qui ne m'a pas non plus emportée. il y a des passages drôles avec le contraste entre cette famille de mafieux repentis et ce tout petit village normand. Mais cela ne m'a pas suffi...

Jim Fonseca says

An unusual story: basically an American Mafia family story set in France in a small rural town in Normandy. The book is translated from the French. It's kind of a fun romp, the type of novel I would give a "3" to but I decided on a "4" because of the depth of the character development.

The American Mafia family from New Jersey is in France on the "witness protection" program. They are supposedly shadowed by two FBI men living across the street from the family's home who monitor all the neighborhood telephone calls and all the comings and goings to protect the family from retribution by the mob.

The main character, a 50-ish ex-Mafia hit man, or, technically, to make him a bit more lovable, an "assistant hitman," sung like a bird to the FBI, defying the Mafia code of silence and revealing all their secrets, resulting in life-long prison terms for those he worked with including his best friends and even family members. Naturally we are told he is the "number one most wanted man in the world."

At the end of the novel, the Mafia finds out where the family is living and sends an elite hit squad to kill them. The story deteriorates into a Keystone Cops type plot as the main character and the FBI guys go through town killing the would-be assassins.

So, a fun read, but what saved the novel for me is the well-developed portrayal of the individual characters of the four members of the family.

The main character is unrepentant. He has found an old typewriter and spends his time banging out on two fingers his "memoirs." "He was dipping his pen into the darkness of his soul -- And that ink would surely never run dry." He ponders the semicolon: "How could a sentence both come to an end and carry on at the same time?"

His wife tries to make up for the guilt she feels about how her family made its living by turning to volunteer work and she "mothers" the two FBI guys across the street by bringing them home-cooked Italian dishes. She tells her husband "Well, believing in God, for me, was that light blanket [that she used in bed even when it was warm], and you've taken it away from me."

The high-school aged daughter is portrayed as an angel. Beautiful, innocent, helpful to everyone.

The high-school aged son wants to be just like his father but without the violence. He's a "fixer:" negotiating with everyone, holding court to help his fellow students solve their problems, settling disputes and taking a cut of the action. He wants to become the "giver of 'alternative' justice that prevails once the law has failed. He had dropped the criminal side of Mafia behavior and had just retained their way of getting things done."

The son wants nothing more to go back to New Jersey and establish himself in this role back in his home territory. At a neighborhood barbecue they sponsor, the son tells his mother: "That's all they ever hear about. Steaming, boiled vegetables, grilled fish, fizzy water. We're going to free them from guilt, Mom, we're going to give them fat and sugar – that's what they expect from us."

An original story, a far-fetched plot, a bit of fun and saved by some good writing. As the blurbs say, "crime fiction that makes you chuckle." You can figure out the title for yourself: maybe it should have been titled "The Godfather Comes to Gueron" LOL. The book has also been translated into English under the title "Badfellas" and it was made into a French movie under the English title "The Family."

Photo of Bayeux in Normandy from wayfaringwithwagner.com

Manny says

An entertaining story about a former Mob family that relocates to a small town in France. (The Witness Protection Program is having problems keeping them safe in the US). It is a little disconcerting that Fred/Giovanni, a ruthless and brutal killer, somehow comes across as basically a good guy. This isn't Godfather-style idealization of the Mafia - the author spends some time talking about that - so what exactly is he doing? I wasn't completely sure he knew either. But I couldn't put it down, and there are some hilarious sequences.

Here's how it begins. The family has just arrived in the sleepy little French village. The next day, the kids have to start in school, while Maggie, the mother, goes out to do some shopping. Fred stays at home. So Maggie goes down to the local store, and can't find peanut butter anywhere. In the end, she gives up and asks. The owner tells her in his inimitable French way that there's not much call for it round here. Five minutes later, she hears two women in the next aisle chatting about that bloody American bitch looking for peanut butter, *merde*, who do these people think they are? Maggie, who prides herself on the efforts she's made to learn French language and culture, is hurt. She slips some cotton-wool and lighter fluid into her bag, and casually torches the store on the way out.

Delicious 17 year-old Belle is starting high school. Everyone thinks her name is ridiculous, but also very descriptive. A guy insists on driving her home, but takes a completely different route that ends up at the other side of town. He stops the car. They get out. She asks what the hell is going on. He looks stupidly at her, and tries out some unsubtle moves. She sighs, picks up a tennis racket from the back seat, and breaks his nose with it. Then, while he's rolling around in agony on the grass, she tells him sweetly that he'll have to improve his lines, or he'll never get anywhere with girls. She gets back into the car and drives home, leaving him there.

The younger kid, Wayne, is also starting school. At morning recess, the tough gang beat him up and take his lunch money. Wayne isn't fazed. He spends the rest of the day discretely chatting to his new classmates and

gathering information. He's on the football team and is keen on her... her brother is failing math... her best friend is the other girl... she's always had a crush on him... she never fails to ace the math tests. Pretty soon, he has a complete jigsaw. Then it's just a question of setting up a few deals. At the end of the day, the tough gang are ambushed by three suitably incentivized members of the football team, who have to be restrained before they start breaking bones. Wayne tells the one-time tough guys he wants the money back by tomorrow, with 900% interest.

Mom, daughter and son arrive home simultaneously. Fred looks at them. He asks mechanically how their day's been. And they answer in chorus, "Fine!"

Update: I just discovered that this is also available in English translation, under the title *Badfellas*.

On the flight back to Switzerland yesterday, I watched the movie version with Robert De Niro, Michelle Pfeiffer and Tommy Lee Jones. They have taken a few liberties with the story, but I am pleased to say that the opening sequence was pretty much exactly as described here.
