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A young man has been brutally murdered. The gay son of a wealthy family has disappeared. Now it's up to private dick Don Strachey to get to the bottom of this mess--even if he has to cruise every gay bar in the city to do it. Don Strachey isn't exactly the most sought-after private eye in Albany, New York. In fact, this gay P.I. has gotten to the point of having to write checks to pay his tab at the cheapest lunch counter in town. And he isn't sure that the latest one, for the grand total of two dollars and ninety-three cents, is going to clear. Then the phone rings. Billy Blount, the gay heir to one of Saratoga Springs' upper-crust families, has disappeared, and his parents want him back. On top of that, Billy, a young and outspoken gay activist, is wanted for the grizzly murder of the man he slept with on his last night in Albany--a man he'd never met before that night.

Set in the glorious, promiscuous pre-HIV late 1970s, *Death Trick: A Murder Mystery* is a fast-paced excursion through the seamy underside of gay Albany. From gay discos where the hard-pumping music never stops, to the city's infamous baths, to the dark alley behind the local precinct house, this hard-bitten private dick searches for answers to the questions that plague Billy's parents and the police. With his faithful companion (and unfaithful lover) Timmy, plus a cast of characters that includes drag queens, ex-jock gay bar owners, homophobic cops, male hustlers, and wealthy suburbanites, Strachey begins a chase that leads him to seedy gay bars, posh suburban homes, and pricey mental institutions where they use electric shock to destroy "sick" gay tendencies.

Death Trick Details

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Author : Richard Stevenson

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From Reader Review *Death Trick* for online ebook

Jaime says

Summary : Donald Strachey murder mystery: Don is hired by Billy Blount's parents to get him out of an awkward and embarrassing situation: he's accused of murder. In their minds, though, the fact he's gay is of much greater consequence. It soon becomes Don's intention not to just find Billy, but to prove he's innocent of all charges.

My review: This is one of the better Strachey books, I think. I really enjoyed this one, with it's fast and loose narrative and characters too likeable to hold their little transgressions against them. The mini glimpses into Don and Timmy's relationship only leaves you wishing you knew more about them, how they manage to stay together, and why on earth they can't keep it in their pants when they have each other. Of course, I read for the romance, so that's what I'm going to notice.

Their mystery plot is nicely paced, woven through the relationships of the men involved, and nicely wrapped up. Don's quirky method gets him into almost as much trouble as it gets his falsely accused murder suspect out of, but he manages to come out on top.

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Kelly says

As another reviewer stated, this book doesn't feel it's age. Not really. Or maybe I'm simply old enough to ~~remember~~ appreciate the slightly retro feel. As a detective novel, *Death Trick* works. I suspected everyone right up until the final twisty reveal. I also liked just about everyone, which made my suspicion feel a bit greasy. Great characters. What I liked best about this book, though, was the glimpse of the gay scene circa 1980. The setting felt wonderfully authentic.

Evan says

Overview:

Well written and enjoyable, this book does an excellent job of transporting you to the gay scene of the late 70s, early 80s. The change between then and now, is interesting and, for those not acquainted with the scene at the time, can be somewhat amazing.

Characters:

Donald is an intelligent, quick thinking smart-mouthed, and somewhat straight-seeming detective. At various points in the novel his sexuality is questioned and I loved seeing his responses each time. The majority of the supporting characters are reasonably strong, with their own personalities, motives and roles to play in the story to propel it forward.

Setting:

Having not lived in the 70s and 80s, I can't speak for the scene at the time, but the novel does an excellent

job making you feel like you're there. Reading about the late parties, the casual sex, and the harassment that was just oh so common at the time was very interesting and compelling for someone who has never actually lived through that part of our history. This taking place before the spectre of AIDS however, left a certain... intellectual pall over the setting, knowing what was coming within the next few years.

Plot:

A straight-forward, story-driven mystery. A young gay man has been murdered, and the young gay suspect has gone missing. Donald must follow the clues and various leads to unravel the mystery of not just what happened to the missing man, but who committed the murder.

The resolution to the mystery was alright, but nothing special. Although it's technically solvable before the big reveal, it requires a certain amount of out of the box thinking that I just don't think most people will have, so it felt a little bit weak. That being said, it didn't actually bother me.

Other Pros:

This book being written from the perspective of an unapologetic gay man, I appreciated reading passively about the male gaze. The language and banter is clever, and funny.

Other Cons:

The e-book could have used some editing, the first paragraph or two of each chapter is bolded for no apparent reason and I swear I saw it happen several times as well. Also, I would have appreciated to see more scenes showing the love between Donald and his lover, Timmy. We see him have sex with other people *it was a different time*, but those scenes have more page-time than the few sentences we see between him and his lover. Additionally, there was one super awkward line comparing someone's asshole to an opening baby's mouth. That was... unnerving.

Final Thoughts:

Good book, compelling mystery and funny, smart characters. I'll definitely be following this series.

leigh says

Intriguing gay mystery set in the late 1970's. Not a genre romance, although the main character has a boyfriend.

Don Strachey, private eye, is hired by the wealthy society parents of a murder suspect who has gone on the lam. They want Don only to find their son, not to prove his innocence. As the investigation proceeds, Don learns that his clients have arranged for Billy to be admitted to a psychiatric clinic to "cure" his homosexuality. His sympathies entirely with Billy, Don tries to find him while an unknown menace—and possible killer—stalks Billy's friends and associates.

Aside from the repeated references to disco songs by name, and car models that don't exist any more, this didn't have a dated feel to it. Gay clubs are gay clubs, anonymous sex is anonymous sex. HIV was unheard of and condoms were only contraceptives, but "the clap" was a known risk which is addressed. Don and his lover, Timmy, both have encounters with people outside their relationship, and this has nothing to do with "the times" but rather their own attitudes. Official and police harassment of gays is blatant and unapologized-for. This is rarer nowadays, but by no means nonexistent.

Don has a sarcastic style and many of the characters trade barbs and quips in a catty, we're-so-clever manner. I find this type of humor wearying after a while. Narrative style aside, the plot, mystery, and characters are all interesting and the ultimate resolution a good surprise. Relationship-wise, Don and Timmy are left with some questions to ponder about where they're going in the sequel. Four stars.

Lena♥Ribka says

Guys, I've found a new great mystery series and I'm very happy about it!

The 13 existed instalments make already my blood boil and my pulse race!

In spite of the fact that the first book in the series was published in **1981**(?!), it is such a refreshing and surprisingly very up-to-date read! I don't know why I have never heard about **Donald Strachey** before, because a few instalments have already been made into a TV-film with Chad Allen in the main role. Yes, it is him.

The plot of the first book reminded me in some way of Nick Nowak series. Don is also an openly gay PI with a dry humour that makes the first person POVs to a very enjoyable read in spite of serious and sad moments(homophobia all around, awful but true!).

An interesting view to a gay lifestyle in a gay society before the Aids epidemic in the early 1980s, entertaining characters, intrigues, sex, good thought out mystery, Don and his relationship with his faithful companion (and unfaithful lover) Timmy, a clever and funny writing- all that make me want to read more!

Highly recommended to all fans of a gay mystery!

This book was already for a while on my TBR but every time I looked at this cover...

Who can tell me what this dog is doing there? If a cover can discourage potential readers, then it is the best example. JUST IGNORE IT!

Rob says

I first heard of the Donald Strachey mysteries from the TV movies starring Chad Allen. I liked the movies, so I decided to try the books.

Death Trick was written in 1979. Before AIDS changed everything about gay life. This book is a time capsule to a long-gone era. During the narration, the protagonist, private investigator Don Strachey, keeps us informed of the songs that are playing on the local disco radio station, the songs playing in the bars and discos where the action takes place. We see the freedom of casual sex and anonymous sex. We see hustlers, drug dealers, disco queens, lawyers; all layers of gay society in Albany NY in 1979.

In this era after Stonewall activism but before AIDS activism and the change in society since, we see the way the police and public treat gay people. Don investigates this case for many reasons, but mostly because the police have already tried and convicted the suspect merely because he's gay, and so don't do much real investigating of their own. Don antagonizes the police investigator along the way, but, when Don has all the facts and presents them to the cop, the cop is smart enough to see the truth despite his bigotry.

I highly recommend this book. Sure, it's not highbrow literature, but it's not intended to be. Read and enjoy.

Jane says

Some comments:

- The case in Death Trick is later referenced in Tongue Tied (so the time span between these two books is 1979 to 2000?).
- Death Trick is a bit graphic than the others; there's one explicit sex scene between the protagonist and a minor character of the book.
- Death Trick is the first book published in the Donald Strachey series.

As first book goes, Death Trick is a great opener, with a right touch of suspense, intrigue and character development.

James says

Loved it!

It's your classic pulp detective mystery, sure. But it wasn't exactly predictable. The writing was economical, the story suspenseful, and the ending was satisfying.

What most grabbed me, as a reader, was the casual conversations between characters in the bars and concerning gay life in general. It felt like, despite being 30 years ago, these were conversations I'd have with my friends today. In fact, there were several instances I could swear I've had those exact exchanges with friends of mine. I identified completely with the sort of smallish town bar scene where everyone knows everyone, or at least knows someone who knows everyone. It was as if the names and places had been changed to protect the not-so-innocent, and me, my friends, my bars, were the not-so-innocent.

The only bad thing I have to say is that I purchased the Kindle version from Amazon and the formatting was a bit of a nightmare. The pages running together and font size changes I could deal with, no problem...but the formatting was so sloppily done that lines of dialog often weren't separated on their own lines between characters, and sussing out who said what took some work. So the conversion to ebook format could have been done much better to allow for a smoother read. Though, with that said, it may have allowed for deeper analysis of conversations in the text which, had it been properly formatted, certain nuances may have been missed. Still, I would hope that would be corrected.

In any case, Death Trick is a fun, quick and dirty read that will not disappoint.

Kati says

Death Trick is the first novel in the Donald Strachey Mysteries series by Richard Stevenson.

I admit that I bought the book because it's a "gay mystery" i.e. it features a gay detective. Usually, these books are full of sex, even porny, and the plot itself takes the backseat, but this book is an exception to this rule. It proved to be a very intriguing story with some very unexpected twists and turns.

Also, even though it's a mystery book, I used the "historical" tag here. This book takes place in the late 70's/early 80's, in a time when nobody knew anything about AIDS yet. The social life of gay men is described in vivid details here so that it doesn't surprise the reader at all that this sickness spread so quickly among the community.

Tex Reader says

3.5 of 5 stars – Decent Start of an Entertaining Stevenson/Strachey Series.

I love gay mysteries and romances, and this first book did a decent job of combining both to start one of the more entertaining such series. I can see why it continues to this day (Richard Stevenson is currently working on #15!). I liked this for the same reasons I liked each in the series. With crisp, witty writing, it's a decent mystery, set in the energized post-Stonewall era, and brought to life by a colorful, hard-boiled yet likable PI, who just happens to be gay.

Stevenson's style made this a light, entertaining and easy read, with a good plot, pace, tension and just enough details and clues to not slow down the action. I enjoyed the step back in time to 1979. This was the kind of historical that, at the time, was written as a contemporary piece, capturing moments of what were then current situations and culture. Among the many time capsule tidbits I enjoyed were the many disco songs, along with the clothes, dated technology, and political, high-spirited post-Stonewall era. And for those interested, it worked well as a standalone, with its own self-contained mystery, while also introducing Strachey, his lover and other supporting characters in a way that created a storyline spanning across the series.

What engaged me the most with this story was the character of Don Strachey (who gave his first-person POV), and one would probably have to like him to like this book. I grew to like him for all his skills, heart and humanness; and it was refreshing that he was not in shame of but was open about being gay. He was hard-boiled, cynically humorous with witty banter, and at times a little off-kilter, including some convenient ethics (such as on the question of infidelity). While Strachey was well drawn, the others were not as much. That might be expected with secondaries, but I wished for a little more with some, his lover in particular. Thankfully, a little better drawn, even if a bit stereotypically, was the bigoted, begrudging local police detective who served as a nice foil.

I appreciated that the main focus was on the mystery, with the gay aspect and any romance as a subplot. As Strachey put it in Book 2, "I'm a PI, yes, and more or less coincidentally gay." So, instead of being an m/m romance, there were actually two mysteries – a murder of a gay man and a disappearance of a gay son. These

mysteries were decent and fairly suspenseful, with the investigation having realistic twists and turns. However, there may have been a little too much “telling” and not “showing” when it came to the story of the suspect. But that’s not different from many mysteries, including a sort of tell-all reveal at the end, leading to a believable solution.

Mixed in with all this was a nice bonus of Strachey’s gay life, including a new lover, Timmy. It’s an interesting relationship, reflecting the realities of such things, including working out what kind of a relationship, the struggles, temptations, understanding, and amusing banter between the two. And for those interested, any sex scenes were nicely built but discretely taken offscreen.

I was impressed with the level of quality that Stevenson brought to this debut in the series, and I look forward to the next one.

Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

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Mare SLiTsReaD Reviews says

I liked it. The sarcasm is totally up my alley

Neet says

This is the first book in Richard Stevenson's Don Strachey's mysteries. I was feeling very nostalgic and felt like reading these mysteries from the very beginning. I had the paperbacks which I got from a wonderful little mystery book store that is sadly gone. I no longer have the paperbacks of the series, all of them were falling apart and worn. I decided to replace them and start reading them on my Nook. Don Strachey's mysteries take place and were written in the preAIDS era. Don is a PI with a quick wit and an attitude. He is hired by the wealthy parents of a young man who is accused of stabbing to death a young man he tricked with. The young man is on the run, his parents are homophobic, and they hire Don because of his connections with the gay community. Don isn't naive, he's got the parents number. I absolutely love Don Strachey, he's a smartass and intelligent. I love that he's in a relationship with Tim Callahan, a man who gets and loves Don. I was one of those who happened to like the HERE Strachey mysteries with the sexy Chad Allen playing Don. I wish they were still on. Oh well, I'll just read the wonderfully written series which I highly recommend!

Josh says

Probably the first gay mystery I read that had a sense of humor without being stupid.

Deanna Against Censorship says

A mystery that took me back to the 70's. A murder mystery set in a lifestyle that existed before Aids. A well written mystery with entertaining characters, some likeable and some not. Don Strachey is a licensed detective who is gay and is very funny. He is also a very good detective. I did not feel any true emotion between him and his lover, Timmy. There did not seem to be anything between them except occasional sex. Strachey seemed to feel more emotion for many others than for Timmy. This was a well written mystery that was set in the gay community of the 70's, yet it was first and foremost a mystery. The look at pre-HIV was a reminder of the innocence of the 60's and 70's for both homo- and hetero- sexual lifestyles. Weird to speak of innocence of "free love" but it was. A good mystery well worth reading. Funny and irreverent.
