



The Guards

Ken Bruen

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Still stinging from his unceremonious ouster from the Garda Síochána—the Guards, Ireland’s police force—and staring at the world through the smoky bottom of his beer mug, Jack Taylor is stuck in Galway with nothing to look forward to. In his sober moments Jack aspires to become Ireland’s best private investigator, not to mention its first—Irish history, full of betrayal and espionage, discourages any profession so closely related to informing. But in truth Jack is teetering on the brink of his life’s sharpest edges, his memories of the past cutting deep into his soul and his prospects for the future nonexistent.

Nonexistent, that is, until a dazzling woman walks into the bar with a strange request and a rumor about Jack’s talent for finding things. Odds are he won’t be able to climb off his barstool long enough to get involved with his radiant new client, but when he surprises himself by getting hired, Jack has little idea of what he’s getting into.

Stark, violent, sharp, and funny, *The Guards* is an exceptional novel, one that leaves you stunned and breathless, flipping back to the beginning in a mad dash to find Jack Taylor and enter his world all over again. It’s an unforgettable story that’s gritty, absorbing, and saturated with the rough-edged rhythms of the Galway streets. Praised by authors and critics around the globe, *The Guards* heralds the arrival of an essential new novelist in contemporary crime fiction.

The Guards Details

Date : Published April 1st 2010 by Minotaur Books (first published 2001)

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Author : Ken Bruen

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From Reader Review The Guards for online ebook

Orsodimondo says

SENZA DISTINTIVO

Iain Glen interpreta Jack Taylor in due non memorabili TV movie del 2010 e 2013 da cui sono prese queste foto.

Don Winslow ha inserito questo libro nella sua personale classifica delle cinque top crime novel: avendo letto tre titoli su cinque, e avendoli trovati più che notevoli, mi sono fidato del consiglio di Don e ho cercato questo romanzo di Ken Bruen, che in italiano si chiama molto banalmente ‘Prima della notte,’ mentre in originale è ‘The Guards’, essendo Garda la polizia irlandese, di fama alquanto dubbia.

Ho fatto bene ad ascoltare il Don.

Mi sono trovato immerso in un noir in piena regola, addirittura di quel filone classicissimo che possibilmente si rifà a Chandler, dove l’indagine dell’occhio privato è anche indagine morale, lotta del bene contro il male (lontanissimi da Thompson, Woolrich, Leonard, lo stesso Winslow...).

A elementi di assoluta fedeltà al genere (cominciando dall’inizio, la bella donna che entra nel bar e chiede un favore allo stazionario investigatore privato mettendo in modo l’indagine e il plot) se ne intrecciano altri nuovi, a cominciare dall’ambientazione, Galway, la più grande città sulla costa ovest irlandese pur avendo ben meno di centomila abitanti, sorta di gran paesone di fronte alla vastità dell’Oceano Atlantico, ben protetta dalla sua baia.

Iain Glen/Jack Taylor a Galway. Alle sue spalle il fiume Corrib che sfocia nell’Oceano Atlantico proprio in città.

Pub, pinte di Guinness, Jameson, Bushmills, alcol a fiumi, anzi, a oceani: il protagonista è un alcolista semicronico che risolve i casi che la sorte gli affida nelle brevi pause di lucidità tra una sbronza e l’altra. In queste brevi pause, ma anche nei lunghi fumi dell’alcol, insegue quel brandello di giustizia che si può ottenere su questa martoriato pianeta.

Legge libri da quando era bambino, e sul potere della lettura il protagonista Jack Taylor sa dire parole molto belle ed esprimere pensieri profondi.

Ma quello che stupisce è la scrittura di Bruen, da cavallo di razza. Una prosa che qui e là arriva alla soglia della poesia, che sa destreggiarsi tra tristezza e sferzate d’humour nero e neropecce, tra momenti di tenerezza e di durezza, di violenza e redenzione, con dialoghi memorabili.

Nancy Oakes says

Rarely, if ever, do I give a series opener 5 stars, but I just couldn't help myself. I started this book last night, stayed up way too late and finished it and was totally blown away. What a great book; what a great author. I would recommend this to anyone looking for something different in the mystery field, but with a caution: the plot isn't the central focus here -- it is most definitely the characters, especially that of Jack Taylor, the main character.

Jack Taylor lives in Galway, Ireland, is a serious alcoholic and has lost his job with the Garda. He has set himself up as a private detective, knows his is prone to self-destruction, has issues with his mother, and may be one of the most darkly-tormented individuals in crime fiction. But on the other hand, he turns to reading and poetry for comfort and has a soft spot for people he truly cares about.

His office a pub, he gets involved in the case of a suicidal teen whose mother hires him to prove that her daughter's death was murder rather than self-inflicted. The only real lead he has is that she worked in a place with other girls, a few of whom have also committed suicide.

But as I noted above, the plot is not the real story here, so this novel shouldn't be read for the mystery storyline. Jack Taylor stands out as an incredibly fascinating character, one for whom you can't help but feel sorry. The other characters surrounding him really help to draw out Jack's personality; they are also very well drawn. And the writing ...the book is divided into very short chapters that don't always have very much to say, but what's there is to the point and absolutely necessary. I love how the author is able to be very understated yet can get Jack's story out just as if Jack was a real-life, personal friend and the author's telling you all about him. The style is very original; sparse, but yet packs a punch.

I definitely, most highly recommend this book and plan to read all of the Jack Taylor series here shortly. A great read!

Brooke says

It isn't often that you get to read a book by someone who writes in a completely original manner, yet is still intelligible. Ken Bruen has such an interesting writing style and gets so much across with so few words, that I was kept turning pages just from enjoying his style. That said, the stories are also great in the manner of hard-boiled ex-cop alcoholic down-and-out private eyes. His other book that I have read, *The White Trilogy*, was a little harder to get into but worthwhile once I was there (different characters and set in England).

Ann says

[

Jack Taylor is an alcoholic. Jack has a rather violent friend (Sutton) who ends up going off the deep end.
(reading this almost ten years later after I wrote it)

Minty McBunny says

At first I found this book

Annoying

Pretentious

Frustrating

but then in spite of myself, I started to like Jack, warts and all, and had to smile at his affectations and his horrible, flawed behaviors.

I felt like the story was more of a character study than a mystery or thriller, but I liked it that way. What went on in Jack's head and in his life was more interesting to me than the mystery he was investigating. Jack's internal struggles and interpersonal relationships were more compelling than many a thriller I have read of late. I will definitely sign on for more of this series.

Johnny says

A good book. By an obviously skilled writer. But flawed in its choices. The book has a great reputation, a Shamus Award Winner, but I don't think I saw what those other readers saw. To me, it was good, not great.

More Bukowski than Chandler. To call this a Private Eye novel is a stretch, as his profession (like his "case") is an afterthought. I liked that aspect of it. To put the genre story on the fringes and to let it be about something else.

But the book was just too thin. Don't let the 280 pages fool you. This is damn near a novella. But it's not the length that makes it thin, I just couldn't find the depth. The first person drunk/recovering drunk is problematic for a number of reasons.

And the slew of literary references is way to wink-wink for my taste. Adding nothing to the story, except to constantly remind you that you are reading a book by someone who has read books.

Bruen's strength is in his terse fiction. He says a lot with few words. Light on description, he lets the characters and actions play out the story. His skill as a writer is clear, but not all of his choices played to the strength of the story.

Pamela says

I found this book to be

predictable

boring

derivative.

(Insert a random passage from some other mystery novel here.)

The main character is the jaw-dropping original (yeah, right)

alcoholic

lonely

ex-cop.

(Insert lyrics from a random song here.)

The writer's style of using lists is

annoying

pretentious

distracting.

(Insert more random quotes here for no discernable reason other than to pump up the word count.)

I will be reading more of this author when

pigs fly

Hell freezes over

rea--

Never mind. You get the idea. The best thing I can say about *The Guards* is that it's short--with all the white space from those annoying lists and the large hunks of "borrowed/quoted" material, it's much shorter than its 304 pages lead you to believe. Even so, it's a waste of time.

Bill Lynas says

Ken Bruen's first novel featuring former policeman Jack Taylor is full of sharp dialogue & humour. At times there are too many book & music references, but it's good enough to make me want to read the next book in

the series.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

This is hard-boiled private detective with an Irish lilt--and alcoholic slur. Jack Taylor was once in the Garda Siochana--the Irish police--but self-destructed with the aid of drink. As he himself describes his life and behavior, "I could say it was the booze, but that's not true. There's a self-destruct button in me. I keep returning to it." He does--throughout the book, and the novel is as much about that--in fact more about that--than his investigation of a young teen who seemingly committed suicide.

The book is set in Galway, where, kicked off the force, Jack works intermittently as a "finder." As he puts it:

There are no private eyes in Ireland. The Irish wouldn't wear it. The concept brushes perilously close to the hated "informer" ... What I began to do was find things.

This is written first person with great style and voice. Somehow it kept me sympathetic and rooting for Jack despite him being a screwup. And the ending involves a frequent, even cliche element in hard-boiled detective fiction that usually is a deal breaker, and in a strange way it's because Jack is so damaged, it comes off less cold-blooded than it usually would. Jack's voice, the overall pacing and short chapters full of snappy dialogue made this a fast read at one sitting and left me feeling I wouldn't mind more, despite this being that dark and cynical blend you find in hard-boiled fiction that usually leaves me cold. But there's a wit and humor in the narrator that somehow made that darkness bearable.

Cphe says

I've heard about this series for ages and was really glad to see the novel offered for kindle by Endeavour Press. There is a mystery involved with this start to the Jack Taylor series but the fascination is more with the character Jack Taylor himself. The mystery tends to take a bit of a back seat in this novel.

Taylor is an alcoholic and this novel does deal with his battle with the bottle to some extent. He is a hard man with a ready temper but also I felt a decent man. I enjoyed the secondary characters on offer here and the atmosphere of the novel.

I also felt that Jack Taylor was a somewhat older version of "Sean Duffy" from the Adrian McKinty series. The inner quips and both are masters of self-deprecation and love their music.

I'll continue on with the series because I want to find out what the future has in store for Jack Taylor.

Melki says

*See that lover standing
Staring at the ground
He's looking for the real thing
Lies were all he found*

**You can get the real thing
It will only cost a pound
Down where the drunkards roll
Down where the drunkards roll ***

If you're looking for chills and thrills or a sharp, investigative police procedural, this is NOT the book you're looking for. This is more a character study of a tormented man in constant struggle with his demons. It's slow-paced with virtually no action, and the crimes are solved almost by accident rather than brilliant detection. Indeed, for much of the book, our protagonist, Jack Taylor, is too hungover to do much anything but think about his next drink.

An alcoholic's greatest defect is a complete unwillingness to learn from the past.

What I knew from mine was if I drank, chaos reigned. I was no longer under any illusion. Yet I'd have given anything to crack the seal on a bottle of Scotch and fly. Or even, a feast of pints. Close my eyes and there was a table. Wooden, of course. Dozens of creamy Guinness lined in greeting. The head . . . ahhh, just perfect.

I'm still scratching my head as to why I liked this one so much. The book reminded me quite a bit of The Long-Legged Fly which featured another alcoholic detective, though in that story, James Sallis's Lew Griffin seems almost to embrace his drinking problem as part of his mystique and a necessary evil for the work he does.

But Taylor is determined to change and is willing to allow others to help him. Though I would describe him as a loner, his interactions with other characters were my favorite parts of the book - from poor wino, Padraig, to the sweet old ladies at the hotel where he stays - this is what makes this man so fascinating.

Often when I finish the first book of a series, I think to myself that *maybe someday* I'll read more. As soon as I turned the last page of this one, I immediately ordered the next book. Call that a recommendation, if you want. Just know that this pint of creamy Guinness may not be to *your* taste.

*Down Where the Drunkards Roll
by Richard Thompson - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBzRz...>

Paul says

A quirky little novel. It took me a little while to get used to the style, but I gradually warmed up to it and became engrossed, pretty much savoring every word near the end. There's no doubt Lawrence Block's Matt Scudder is the major influence here, and Bruen gives a nod to a host of American crime writers at the start of each chapter. I can see why a lot of people would be divided about his technique, but I would certainly read more of the Jack Taylor series. It's sparse, flippant and brooding; all positives when it comes to crime noir.

Josh says

This is the third time I've read THE GUARDS and it just keeps getting better.

Jack Taylor, dishonorably discharged from the guards after having physically assaulted a member of high standing succumbs further to the allure of the drink; that bottomless pit of clouded reality seen through shot and pint glasses alike.

It's this downfall that leads to his new profession, albeit and informal one - that of a private detective. His office; the pub. His clientele; the downright desperate. Enter Ann, an attractive woman who is wanting justice for her deceased 16yr old daughter - a suspected suicide which turns out to be anything but once Jack does a little digging. The patterns emerge, the guilty are judged, and Jack has blood on his hands.

There is something about the Jack Taylor series that keeps me coming back for more. Jack, a tainted soul with good intentions (when it suits) is an addictive character - both literally and fictionally. His constant ability to made bad from good makes for an enthralling read. You know he's going to fall off the wagon - the only question is, how hard? Plenty hard.

THE GUARDS could easily be a one-and-done read but I'm pleased Ken Bruen continued Taylor's slow self inflicted demise over many volumes. Next up in my Jack Taylor series re-read THE KILLING OF THE TINKERS.

Review first appeared on my blog: <http://justaguythatlikes2read.blogspot.com>...

Steve says

The blurbs on the back of Ken Bruen's novel *The Guards* are impressive: Boston Teran, James Crumley, and T. Jefferson Parker, who all weigh in with thumbs up. And these are wonderful writers who have written fine books that I really admire. So I'm mystified over their enthusiasm. In contrast, what I found in *The Guards* was a loosely told story about a drunk cop who pretty much stays that way. Oh, there's a story nibbling around the edges regarding some missing women and the bad men who did them in, but that's pretty much it, though you could probably toss in some mid-life crisis moments as an extra yawn subplot. Justice comes around, as you know it must, but only as a kind of remember-to-burp afterthought. The novel has virtually no inner tension. It's part joke and valentine to a genre. There's local Galway color -- with various characters who seem to be either members of the Pogues (in particular Cathy B. -- who I wanted to see more of), older Irish thugs (Sutton -- who may or may not be Irish), or stock figures such as quipping Irish priests and iron willed martyed Irish mothers. The love interest (and not-to-be-believed grieving mom), Ann, is more a sketch of a character than a character. Ian Rankin delivers similar Local Stuff in a far more substantive way. With Rankin, you know you've read a story. In comparison to any Rankin novel, *The Guards* reads like something hastily written out on a bar napkin. Dialogue is supposed to a big deal with this novel, and it is pretty good. But comparisions to Elmore Leonard, who always remembers he needs a story to go with the dialogue, is simply name-dropping and nothing more. Where the book excels is in its various what-to-read and what-to-listen to suggestions. (Bruen does have good tastes in those areas.) But that's not enough to escape the ripped-off feeling one feels after reading this mess.

James Thane says

Jack Taylor has been thrown out of the Irish police force--the Garda Siochana--because his drinking got out of control. Ireland has virtually no private investigators because of the cultural abhorrence of informers, so Jack becomes the next best thing. He is an expert at finding things, that is when he can climb off of his bar stool long enough to take a job. Then one day a beautiful woman walks into the Galway pub where Jack hangs his hat and asks to hire him.

The woman, whose name is Ann, has recently lost her daughter, Sarah. The girl's death has been ruled a suicide, but Ann cannot accept that and asks Taylor to look into it. He agrees and quickly discovers that several other young women have also apparently committed suicide at the same spot. In and around some serious bouts of drinking and a couple of hospitalizations, Jack investigates Sarah's death, determined to provide some closure for the girl's mother. As is always the case in a book like this, he winds up getting more than he bargained for.

This is the first in a series of books featuring Jack Taylor and it includes any number of classic crime novel clichés, most notably the alcoholic cop who becomes the alcoholic P.I., leaving the reader to wonder no only whether Taylor will solve the case, but whether he will get sober and whether he will stay sober if he ever does. The character is strongly reminiscent of Lawrence Block's Matthew Scudder who, in the early stages of his career as a P.I., met clients in bars and livened up his morning coffee with booze. Bruen also goes a bit overboard in his attempt to show how widely-read and musically hip Jack Taylor is, but those qualms aside, this is a well-written book with a number of engaging characters. It remains to be seen if Jack Taylor will have a career as long and as successful as Matthew Scudder, but *The Guards* is a promising start.
