



A Drop of the Hard Stuff

Lawrence Block

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"Right up there with Mr. Block's best....A DROP OF THE HARD STUFF keeps us guessing."--Tom Nolan,
Wall Street Journal

Facing his demons in his first year of sobriety, Matthew Scudder finds himself on the trail of a killer. When Scudder's childhood friend Jack Ellery is murdered, presumably while attempting to atone for past sins, Scudder reluctantly begins his own investigation, with just one lead: Ellery's Alcoholics Anonymous list of people he wronged. One of them may be a killer, but that's not necessarily Scudder's greatest danger. Immersing himself in Ellery's world may lead him right back to the bar stool.

In a novel widely celebrated by critics and readers, Lawrence Block circle back to how it all began, reestablishing the Matthew Scudder series as one of the pinnacles of American detective fiction.

A Drop of the Hard Stuff Details

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Author : Lawrence Block

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From Reader Review A Drop of the Hard Stuff for online ebook

James Thane says

After a long six years, Lawrence Block finally delivers A Drop of the Hard Stuff, the seventeenth book featuring New York P.I., Matthew Scudder. Beginning with The Sins of the Fathers in 1976, Block has parceled the Scudder books out over a period of thirty-five years, much to the frustration of fans who can't get enough of them. But each book has been worth the wait, and this one is no exception.

By now, Matthew Scudder would be in his middle seventies, and so Block cleverly sets this book back in the early 1980s, when Scudder is still in his middle forties and at a critical point in his life. As virtually every fan of crime fiction knows, in the early books in the series, Scudder, a divorced ex-cop, had a serious problem with alcohol. In the nick of time, he found AA and saved himself, and in A Drop of the Hard Stuff, Block returns to the first year of Matt's sobriety, when he's still struggling with temptation and adjusting to a new way of life that involves attending an awful lot of AA meetings.

At one such meeting, Scudder re-connects with Jack Ellery. The two knew each other briefly as boys, but haven't seen each other in years. Ellery has followed an even tougher road than Scudder. While young Matt grew up to be a cop, young Jack grew up to become a criminal and has spent time in jail as a result.

Ellery is now clean and sober as well and is working his way through AA's famous Twelve Steps. Matt is just beginning this journey and is in no particular hurry. Jack has reached the latter stages of the process and is at the point where he has made a list of the people whom he has harmed and is attempting to apologize and make amends. When Ellery is found murdered, with a bullet in his mouth, his friends in AA leap to the logical conclusion that someone that Jack harmed was not content simply to accept an apology. Either that, or someone feared the consequences of Jack's apologies and wanted to silence him. Ellery's AA sponsor hires Matt to look into the murder which sets Matt on a course that will lead to even more violence and place Matt himself at great personal risk.

As always, the real treat in these books is watching Scudder at work, especially since this book takes place before personal computers were commonplace, long before Al Gore invented the Internet, and when the only person who had something approaching a cell phone was still Dick Tracy. It's also fun to meet again some of the characters that Block had introduced early in the series and who had then disappeared from the books for one reason or another. And, as always, the setting in New York City is a major part of the book, and Block is clearly nostalgic for a time and a place that has long since disappeared.

Any long-time fan is also going to read this book with a fair sense of nostalgia. You can't help but wonder if this might finally be the last book in a truly great series. One desperately hopes that this will not be the case, but if it is, then this is certainly a good book for Block--and Scudder--to go out on. But in truth, the same could be said for any of the recent entries in this series, and one can't help but point out that A Drop of the Hard Stuff proves that Block certainly has the chops to keep writing it. The book is as engaging and as entertaining as virtually any of the other Scudder books and one can only hope that we will not have to wait another six years to see Matthew Scudder again.

Jason Koivu says

[An old school friend/crook he's been recently reacquainted with is trying to get his life in order when he gets done in. (hide spoiler)]

Lynn says

Matt and Mick are too old to hang out like they used to, and too old for the adventures of hard men, but on a rare occasion they can chat all night about the past. I'm happy to eavesdrop. I wish there were many more of these books in my future.

Kemper says

Winner, winner, chicken dinner!

Thanks to a contest here on Goodreads, I ended up with an advanced reader's copy of the new Matt Scudder novel. I had actually been rereading all of the Scudder books in preparation for the release of this in May, but I had only made it to *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes* when this arrived. I briefly thought about waiting while I reread the rest of the series, but I'm not known for my patience or willpower so I burned through this in less than 24 hours.

There's two ways to approach writing a character in a long running series. The author can put them in a limbo where they are timeless and there are never any big changes, or the character can age and grow as the series goes along. Block did this as well as anyone ever has in the Scudder books by taking Matt from a drunk former cop living in a hotel to his eventual recovery and building of a life for himself. The only downside to this is that the timeline puts Matt around 70 now, and Block had recognized this by slowing Matt down considerably and only writing two Scudder books in the last ten years.

To get around the geezer factor here, Block goes back to a trick he used in *When the Scared Ginmill Closes*, the flashback. *A Drop of the Hard Stuff* begins in a familiar setting with Matt and his friend Mick Ballou having one of their all night gab sessions in a closed saloon while Mick sips Irish whiskey and Matt has his club soda. In the framing chapters, Matt lets us know that even Mick has slowed down at this point, and that their all night talk fests are getting pretty rare since neither of them can pull an all-nighter like they used to. In the course of the conversation, Matt brings up a childhood friend, Jack Ellery, and tells Mick a story of what happened back in the mid-'80s, during Matt's first year of sobriety.

Matt and Jack knew each other as kids for a couple of years, but later, Jack became a petty criminal. Matt even saw him in a line-up once at his police station when he was still a cop. But when Matt bumps into Jack again at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, he finds that Jack has almost twice as much time sober as he does and is in the middle of his step of making amends to those he harmed while drinking.

Shortly after this, Jack turns up murdered. His sponsor, Greg, thinks that Jack may have accidentally stirred up someone while making his apologies to those he wronged back when he was a criminal, but he doesn't want to cause trouble for any innocent people. So Greg hires Matt to look into those that Jack was making amends to in order to see if there's any viable suspects they can turn over to the police.

As this is going on, Matt is dealing with his upcoming first anniversary of sobriety and thinking about the

next steps he needs to take. Seeing how hard Jack had worked to try and make up for his sins, but then getting killed because of it has rattled Matt. There are other lingering questions with Matt's relationship with his steady girlfriend, another recovering alcoholic.

Reading this right after going back through *8 Million Ways to Die* recently turned out to be perfect timing because the story takes place shortly after that, and since I've gone through the books with Matt's early boozing days, getting some of his story during his first year of sobriety was a great piece of his history.

As usual in the best of the Scudder novels, the mystery has elements that make Matt reflect on his personal life. The flashback aspect also plays into the wistfully nostalgic and melancholy tone that Block does so well in these books. This also features Matt yet again coming up with a creative way to deal with the killer after finding him. First time readers of Scudder should be warned that Matt does think about and discuss some of the people and cases he's worked before so you could get some spoilers to some of the previous books. However, if you don't care about that and are just looking for a terrific character based crime novel, you won't find many better than this.

Now that he's used the flashback again to create another first rate Scudder novel, I'm torn between hoping that Block will use the idea again and again or thinking that this should be the final farewell to Matt. He could certainly have Matt tell more stories from all over his thirty plus year career as a private detective. On the other hand, the opening and closing chapters in this have a nice tone of finality to them with Mick and Matt setting in the dark bar for what could be the last time. Whatever Block decides to do next, I'm glad we got this tale of Matt's earlier days.

carol. says

Sometimes nostalgia is a boozy, teary drunk, blathering on about loss, other drunken times, other bottles. And sometimes, it's a fine stroll down memory lane, leafing through a photo album of your friends and that one perfect summer, a glass of wine in your hand. Block nails it here in the (currently) last of the Matt Scudder series, walking the fine line between fond remembrance and maudlin. He and Mick are closing the pub, Mick with his whiskey, Scudder with his club soda. Looking back, Mick wonders, "could you have gone the other way?" What follows is a well done tale, set during the time Scudder was off the force and doing 'favors' out of his hotel residence, and working hard to stay sober, one day at a time.

It begins with Jack Ellery, an old boyhood chum appearing at an AA meeting. "I knew him at a glance. He looked older than he had on the other side of the one-way glass, and there was more in his face than the years alone could account for. There's no charge for the seats in an AA room, but that's because you pay for them in advance."

Jack went the other way until he did time and finally gave up the booze. He's working the steps, and is wrestling with Step 9, "Make Direct Amends to People whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." Trouble is, when you've led a life of crime, some of those you've injured might react quite badly to your confessional.

The story is as much Scudder's as Jack's, and it's pure reading pleasure as Scudder recounts their wrestling with the AA steps. One of the most interesting parts of Scudder's characterization is his relationship with alcohol. Block has almost always avoided the opportunity to have Scudder wallow in self-pity, and instead captures his somewhat resigned determination to stay sober. This time, Block also touches on his anger. Jack knows early sobriety's a challenge, and is a little unsure about getting in touch with Scudder around his 90-

day sobriety mark:

"I was a little anxious about calling, " he said, 'because I figured you'd make it, but you never know, do you? And how would you feel if you had a slip and here's this asshole calling to congratulate you on ninety days that you haven't got? And I said this to my sponsor, and he reminded me I'm not the center of the universe, which never fails to be news to me."

Things progress (insert plot spoilers here) and we get a chance to watch Scudder investigate as well as negotiate some of the troubles in his own life. The mystery was satisfying, and Block maintains a nice balance between Scudder's issues and those of the investigation. Characterization shines as usual, particularly Greg Stillman, Jack's AA sponsor, and Scooter Williams, pothead and moving man: "His voice trailed off, and I could see him running the question in his mind. He looked to be capable of devoting the next hour to its philosophical implications." Jan and Jim figure prominently in Scudder's life as he comes up on a year of sobriety and reflects on the advice not to make any major changes within the year after quitting.

There's a little bit of wry, gentle humor here, all the more poignant for the melancholy and grief threaded through it. The detective in charge of Jack's case is doubtful of his potential for success: "So I'd like to clear it,' he said, 'because it's on my plate, and my mother raised me to finish everything.' He patted his stomach. 'A lesson I learned all too well. But on the dinner plate of crime, my friend, Jack Ellery is the Brussels sprouts."

I had to laugh at a funny running joke about the word 'sobriquet,' first started by Danny Boy and carried on by Scudder. It's the kind of word game I would indulge in, and I just love that Block does it as well. Scudder also shares a similar feeling about a particular flavor of soda pop:

"We drank our orange sodas out of the can. I couldn't remember the last time I'd had one, and decided I was willing to go that long before I had another."

Then there was a laugh out loud at a New Yorker dig:

"I can't,' I said. 'I have to go to Brooklyn.'

'Really? Were you a bad boy? Are you being punished?'"

Overall, a fabulous read, the best kind of nostalgia where you reflect with a friend and discover something new, something that highlights just a little bit more about their personality and life story, and makes you feel lucky you had the opportunity to share.

Cross posted at <http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2013/0...>

Brandon says

Seeing as Matt Scudder ages along with his creator, Lawrence Block doesn't feel there's much interest in following the activities of a detective in his mid-70s. Rather than write a follow-up to *All The Flowers Are Dying*, Block backtracks about thirty years, all the way back to Scudder's first year of sobriety where he finds himself on the trail of a killer.

An old friend of Scudder's, fellow AA member Jack Ellery, is found murdered. Having no friends or family,

Jack's sponsor hires Matt to look into his death by providing a copy of Jack's eighth step, a list of individuals Jack has wronged during his life. Jack's sponsor believes that one of the people on this list may be responsible for Jack's untimely demise.

Lawrence Sanders has gone on record stating that with *A Drop of the Hard Stuff*, he believes he's written his final Matt Scudder novel, but admittedly, he's believed that on a few occasions. However, if that's the case, you can't blame the guy for wanting to go out on top. *A Drop of the Hard Stuff* is a tightly paced thriller that kept me guessing right up to the very end. **

Many of Scudder's supporting cast members make an appearance or two. Danny Boy Bell, Jan and Jim Fader are present but series favorites Elaine and TJ are noticeably absent given that this story takes place prior to their heavy involvement in Scudder's life. While they were missed, Scudder's battle with booze plays a huge part in the story taking up all of Scudder's free time outside of picking up phones and knocking on doors.

I'm sad to see Scudder go but seventeen original novels leave little room for complaining. *A Drop of the Hard Stuff* is a fine glass of sipping whiskey that goes down smooth.

*** I read this novel on my Kindle. As you know, there's a percentage that shows up in the lower right hand of the screen that indicates how much of the story you've read. Well, I had 91% left when the story finished, so the ending caught me off guard. It made sense but it seemed rather abrupt.*

The remaining 9% was an excerpt from Block's then soon-to-be-released Keller novel, Hit Me.

Bill Kerwin says

This last book in the Matt Scudder series, published in 2011 when Block was seventy, harks back to events in Scudder's life that happened almost thirty years before, in Matt's first year as a recovering alcoholic.. It contains much of the vigor of his earlier work and will be—if Block chooses to end things here—a fine conclusion to a superior series.

This is a frame story (I have always liked frame stories), told by Matt himself to his old friend Mick Ballou during one of their frequent all night sessions—at Ballou's bar "Grogans"—of fellowship and *craic*. It is the story of "High Low Jack" Ellery, a boy from Matt's old neighborhood, who pursued a life of crime during the years when Matt worked on the police force. Years later, Matt encounters Jack at an AA meeting, and is surprised soon after to hear that Jack has been murdered. After the memorial service, Jack's sponsor wants to hire him to investigate: "he is a "step Nazi," the AA sponsor explains, and he fears Jack was killed while scrupulously attempting to complete AA's "Ninth Step": trying to make amends. So Matt begins to interview people whom Jack has harmed in his thieving, dishonest life, and before long—you guessed it—some of them end up dead.

This is a somber tale, but it is meditative and nostalgic too, lacking the jagged edge that characterizes some of Scudder's last adventures. I am glad Block gave us this last yarn, and I will miss those nights with Matt and Mick in the backroom of Grogan's bar.

LJ says

First Sentence: "I've often wondered," Mick Ballou said, "how it would have all gone if I'd taken a different turn."

A present-day Matt Scudder reminisces with his friend, Mick Ballou about a case in his early days of sobriety, particularly an incident when he was approaching his one-year mark in AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). Jack Ellery, now at sixteen months sober, was trying to follow each of the twelve steps; including making reparation to others for the harm he had done them. When Jack is murdered, his AA sponsor asks Matt to find out what happened. Doing so nearly costs Matt his sobriety and his life.

The book opens with a thought we have all considered of "what if?".

I have missed Scudder. Block has a wonderful use of language, a great voice and does dialogue so well. It is very natural with excellent flow with just the right touch of humor. In talking to a cop about the investigation into Jack's murder..."...it is on my plate, and my mother raised me to finish every....But on the dinner plate of crime, my friend, Jack Ellery is the Brussels sprouts." There is a delightful exchange involving the confusion over Buddha, the bouncer at a rough bar, and the Buddha sitting under the bodhi tree. His writing includes wonderful quotes, literary references and small truths that sound cliché because they are true, but they make you think.

Block's sense of place and time add to the depth of the story. You needn't have spent time hanging out in after-hours bars as Block takes you there and draws a chair up to the table for you. His knowledge and love of New York City are apparent in every page, but he is as aware of its dark side and flaws as its attractions. The main part of the story is set in a time before cell phone and technology, when investigation was still done with quarter phone calls, the public library, taking the subway and shoe leather to ask questions. It was a time with HIV/AIDS was just taking hold, but there was not a name for it yet, other than Kaposi's sarcoma. Yet there is a nod to today in the transition back to present time.

Even if one has not read previous Scudder books, the backstory is included in a way to prevent new readers from feeling lost, but doesn't slow down the story at all. Also, one could be concerned that the information on AA could be preachy or depressing, but it's not. Instead, it is a facet of understanding the characters.

This is vintage Larry Block and it's great. All the elements I particularly love about his writing, and particularly the character of Matt Scudder, are all here. If one hasn't read the series before, I always recommend starting at the beginning, but it's also nice that this book stands very well on its own.

A DROP OF THE HARD STUFF (PI-Matthew Scudder-NYC-Cont) – Ex
Block, Lawrence – 17th in series
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Dan Schwent says

A friend of Matt Scudder's from AA winds up dead and it looks as if someone he named in his eight step is

the murderer. Scudder takes the case for a cool grand and begins working the people on the list. Only the killer isn't take things lying down. Will Matt make it to one year sobriety?

You know, every time I read one of Lawrence Block's Matthew Scudder books, I feel as if I've entered a metaphorical genital measuring contest with the esteemed Mr Block. I unzip my pants to reveal that I've read the entire Scudder series and a couple hundred other mystery books besides and have a pretty good head for sleuthing and Block takes his out and shames me with 50 years of misdirecting guys like me. Like a lot of the Scudder books, Block hides the killer in plain sight and dares you to figure out the mystery before Matt. Yeah, old Lawrence got me again.

A Drop of the Hard Stuff is a flashback tale akin to When the Sacred Gin Mill Closes. Matt and Mick Ballou are talking late into the night and Matt brings up a case from the early days. Block did a good job with his references, from the double-bladed disposable razor to the mysterious disease afflicting gay men. It was fantastic seeing old supporting cast members like Jan, Jim, and Danny Boy Bell. The case itself was vintage Scudder. Block crafted a nice cast of losers and douche bags for Matt to interact with. Like I said before, I had no idea who the killer was until Matt figured it out. I'd say that's the mark of an exceptional mystery.

Matt's personal life and continued struggle with sobriety were center stage in A Drop of the Hard Stuff, much like they would be for many books to come. Matt Scudder continues to be one of my favorite characters in all of crime fiction.

Any gripes? Yeah, I wasn't that thrilled with the ending. I didn't like how things were resolved between Matt and the killer. Other than that, I don't have a single complaint.

For Scudder fans of old, this is a must read. It lives up to its predecessors and you won't be disappointed.

Tim says

Very best way to sum up this novel is depressing in spite of the fact the main character manages to stay sober for a year. Congrats on that, but the rest of the novel takes a bender.

Robert says

Hi, my name is Robert Downs, and I'm a member of Lawrence Block Anonymous (LBA for short). I can see why he was named a Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America in 1994. He has the damaged, hard-boiled detective figured out as well as anyone else I've ever read, and his prose flows better than eggnog at Christmastime. And it's easy to keep on guzzling the way his famous PI Matthew Scudder used to swig the hard stuff. A DROP OF THE HARD STUFF indeed. Well, more than, but it's easy to get carried away when it's just so darn good.

If it wasn't for Amazon's Kindle Daily Deals, I might have waited a bit longer before I delved into Matthew Scudder's universe, and that would have been a serious travesty, especially considering my love of hard-boiled novels knows no bounds. I'd travel just about anywhere with a hard-boiled gumshoe at my side.

I'd have to agree with the critics that this is one fine piece of detective fiction, even though it would have

been easy for Mr. Block to let his guard down and go for the low blow. Matthew Scudder felt as real to me as if he was standing right beside me, telling me his story over a cup of joe with a determined look and a never-back-down attitude.

The ending could have been a bit better, but it worked out just fine for the story, and it wasn't out of character for Mr. Scudder. And this proves to be a bit of a minor detail in an otherwise gut wrenching story written with near pitch perfect lyrical prose.

I must say this is one fine hard-boiled read, and if you're into the hard stuff, it's certainly worthy of a bit more attention.

Cross-posted at Robert's Reads

Kathy says

A trip down memory lane with Matt Scudder, ex-cop and AA member...recalling his first anniversary of sobriety and events that surrounded that milestone. His methodical drip-by-drip approach to discover who was responsible for a number of murders was the usual - a satisfying, intimate discussion with an old friend. I can't think of another author who manages to create this level of intimacy between reader and character.

Ed says

I've been a long time admirer of the Matt Scudder hardboiled crime fiction series. The early titles appeal more to me for their edgy, gritty quality, but this new entry does a satisfying job of dipping back into Matt's past. He's approaching his one-year anniversary of sobriety at AA, and working as a quasi-private detective. Several jobs keep him busy while he tries to figure out where his life goes next. By turns elegaic, ruminative, and fatalistic, A Drop of the Hard Stuff offers that same wonderful voice I find so mesmerizing. The hard stuff can also be called the good stuff. You can't go wrong by picking up a Matt Scudder novel to read.

Jim says

Narrated by Tom Stechschulte (added to book description), this was great, my first introduction to Matthew Scudder, even though it is book #17 in the series. I slipped into the world easily. There was some mention of other cases, but it wasn't a big deal & I don't think I'll remember enough details for them to be spoilers. Actually, I got the feeling this series isn't chronological.

I like hard boiled detective novels & this had a lot of the same qualities, but there wasn't much or any real up front violence. Scudder is laid back & trying to make a year of sobriety. He looks into things, but doesn't seem to mix it up much. Very low key. Tom Stechschulte did a wonderful job with everyone's voices, really made the characters pop for me. He & the way AA was handled took a solid 3 star story & made it worth another star.

I'm an alcoholic who works the 12 steps, so any inconsistencies in this area would have really bugged me. None did. It was right on, all the way & that was a nice surprise. So many get it wrong. (OK, I was a little

surprised that an open discussion meeting was reason for comment - it seems he mostly went to speaker's meetings. AA is slightly different in every region, though. My uncle lived in Manhattan & only went to speaker's meetings. I find there are far more open discussion meetings in MD & KY, but maybe that's because I look for them.)

Anyway, it was a real pleasure & I'm sorry that this was the only one available from my library for download.

William says

Well. That was wonderful, a beautiful swan song for Block and his Scudder.

I'm very glad Block found his true heart again, and poured it into his hero and this book. It's a gem, a treasure, a visit to the not-always golden past, a superb detective-noir, a journey of a newly-sober alcoholic (perhaps Block himself, through Matt). The pacing is wonderful, and the dialogue mostly top-notch. Best of all, there's no forced repetition to pad out the saleable length of the book. It's not a masterpiece, but it is a superb ending for Matt's life and struggles and adventures.

There's quite a bit of AA here, and 12-Steps, but it's nicely woven into the noir, nicely flowing into the cracks Block left behind in the previous 16 books, filling Matt's life out and bringing us up to date. A tale told to Mick, two old men reminiscing, wondering how their lives might have been different, as we all do from time to time.

The Masterpiece is, of course:

8 Million Ways to Die (my review) #5

and the superb four are:

Sins of the Fathers #1 my review,

In the Midst of Death #3 my review,

A Stab in the Dark #4 my review,

Out on the Cutting Edge #7 my review.

I would add this book to the list as well.

I do not recommend books #8 - #15 at all. Block has famously never talked of his possible AA membership, but I would strongly suggest that every book he wrote after Matt goes sober is a "virtual AA meeting" for Block, himself. Those books mostly start out fine, then we fall asleep in the repetitive, too-dull middle, and then we wake up for a rousing coffee (shootup) at the end. I suspect Block/Scudder traded alcohol addiction in for an "AA Meeting/Process addiction" - surely better for all. I'm truly happy this worked for him, and for everyone else that AA helps recover their lives.

And I'm so glad we have this final Scudder, this wonderful closure, these familiar faces and times, this farewell. Thank you, Mr. Block.

My own family suffered alcoholism for 17 years, very hard years, very painful, but in recovery now. So I do understand and respect Block's story, as reflected in his hero here.

Notes and Quotes:

Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang
Shakespeare Sonnet 73

Tomorrow's always there, just over the horizon. Until the tomorrows run out.

Lovely Jan ...

"Jan brought me my clothes," I said, "and I gave her back my set of keys, but it turned out we weren't quite done with each other. That took a while longer. We really cared for each other, so we kept trying to make it work, until it was just too obvious that it wouldn't."

-

1.0% ... I'm a fool, perhaps, for desperately wanting a return to some of the brilliance of Block's early books. After reading so many truly crappy books after the exceptional **Out on the Cutting Edge**, I hope to find it here.

9.0% ... it's a nice surprise to see Jan Keane again.

15.0% ...

"Milton?"

"Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. Do you know what Samuel Johnson said of Paradise Lost? He said no one ever wished it longer,"

21.0% ... so many Scudder books and still we get 15 potted character/place/police histories included in every book.

30.0% ... the story by Sattenstein is really quite wonderful.

31.0% ... why do I get the feeling that Block is feeling guilty about Matt's breakup with Jan, so many years ago? He seems to be manipulating Matt into resenting Jan here.

34.0% ... Block is tying up loose ends in Matt's past, and doing the painful breakup with Jan gently, nicely, but it still feels contrived.

42.0% ... a nice swan song, so far. Block touches all the old bases, all the old songs and faces, and the dialogue is very good, not padded. A good feeling to this book.
