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Once A Crooked Man: A Novel



Synopsis

A deliciously quirky crime novel from David McCallum, the beloved actor known for his portrayal of Illya Kuryakin on *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* and Dr. Donald "Ducky" Mallard on *NCIS*. Crime pays. And pays well. Sal, Max and Enzo Bruschetti have proved this over a lifetime of nefarious activity that they have kept hidden from law enforcement. Nowhere in any file, on any computer is there a record of anything illegal from which they have profited. But Max has a problem. His body is getting old and his doctor has told him to take it easy. Max has decided that the time has come for the family to retire. But when young actor Harry Murphy overhears the Bruschetti brothers planning changes to their organization, including the murder of a man in London who knows too much, the Bruschetti's plans begin to unravel. After Harry makes the well-intentioned if egregious mistake of trying to warn the Bruschetti's intended victim he finds himself alone in a foreign country, on the wrong side of the law, with a suitcase full of cash and a dangerous man on his trail. And while his good looks, charm and cheerful persistence may prove assets in the turbulent events that follow, none of Harry's past roles have prepared him for what happens next. A turns tense and funny, Once a Crooked Man is infused with the infectious charm that has made David McCallum one of television's longest running, most-beloved stars.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Picked this up last night and could not put it down--a classic page turner. It's easy to root for main character Harry Murphy as he unwittingly finds himself at the center of an international crime web. Full of fun characters and familiar locales in New York and London.

Things go elaborately and spectacularly wrong when the Bruschetti brothers decide to retire from the crime business, and New York actor Harry Murphy accidentally overhears their plans for murderously cleaning up some loose ends. Harry decides to warn one of the brothers'™ targets, and the more the brothers try to clean things up, the messier they get. "for them, for Harry, for the beautiful and feisty British police agent Harry teams up with, and for various compatriots of the brothers, family members and law enforcement. The action careens around like a pinball arcade game, bouncing from one catastrophe to another, and back and forth between England and New York. The violence is frequent but not too graphic, the cast of characters is huge and colorful, and it's easy to see this being turned into a caper/thriller movie. I'd have liked to see a bit more character development with Harry and the other main characters, and there is a sexual plot point late in the book that struck a false note for me, but on the whole I found this to be an entertaining read and a winning first writing effort by longtime actor David McCallum. Disclosure: The publisher provided a free advance reviewing copy of *Once a Crooked Man*.

**** spoiler alert **** While I love Mr. McCallum, and have since his days playing Ilya Kuriakin, I would advise him not to quit his day job. This story is a combo of mistakes - too many characters who I care nothing about, a family of Mafia who are stereotypically nonentities, a plot that neither makes sense nor leads ANYWHERE, mismatched POV, and paragraphs and paragraphs of telling. Telling, telling, telling some more... Pacing problems. Back and forth flashbacks. Oy. Harry is likeable. An actor caught up in something bigger than himself. Cool concept that could have been done so much better. As the writer is an actor himself, I'm not surprised that Harry is so good at EVERYTHING - apparently, playing a killer/bomber/spy/etc makes you able to act like one. It's okay. Harry is the only positive aspect of this book, so I'm willing to overlook it. If this wasn't bad enough, we have a completely useless (to the plot) sex scene where the main female, taken hostage, tied up, trying to figure out how to get away from the casually violent and homicidal mafia don is strapped to a bondage table and raped. During this she figures out, wow, how about that? I'm actually totally turned on by angry, nasty, rapists who tie me up! Not since Luke and Laura have I been as disgusted by the notion that a woman falls for her rapist. I made myself finish this book out of respect for Mr. McCallum. But... no. Nope. Not good.

I read quite a lot of crime novels for pleasure and, for a first effort, this one isn't bad. However there are several things about it that bother me enough to comment. To me, any work of fiction must draw

me in and immerse me in the protagonist's world to be considered good. Unfortunately, Mr. McCallum's book kept jarring me out of Harry Murphy's world fairly often. A couple of examples: Harry is a native New Yorker from Brooklyn, but often talks like an elderly man from the UK, which the author is. And Harry's skills and luck range from the improbable to the nearly impossible, making me unable to suspend disbelief. What I've mentioned up to now pales in comparison to my main objection to the novel, however. In the last part of the novel there is a rape scene. Being a somewhat violent novel I could have probably accepted it as part of the book if not for the ludicrous, completely out of character reaction of the female victim. This ruined the book for me. I can't recommend it.

This was a very enjoyable book for its being written by David McCallum, a first time author. I think most everyone who likes mysteries will be captivated by the plot. There was one graphic sexual place in the story that I thought was a bit unneeded. Outside of that, the book was a real page turner for me. Should McCallum write another mystery book, I'll be interested in checking it out.

Granted, since David McCallum's name was on the cover, I would have bought the book even if it was blank. That being said, I can't begin to describe how delighted I was to read this book! It's fun, fast-paced, and you just can't put it down! For a first time effort at a novel, this is spectacular. Is there no end to this man's talent? This is a fun book for anyone, so buy it and ENJOY!

Admittedly I purchased this novel because it was written by David McCallum and had no idea what to expect. My actual rating is 3-1/2 stars. This book starts a little slow for me but not so slow that I gave up on it. The premise is a little far fetched but still entertaining, as it is (for the most part) well handled. The main character is very naive but turns out to be something of a Macgyver when it comes to self preservation. I enjoyed the bits of humor that was sprinkled throughout. I did not like the way the police woman was portrayed. I don't want to give too much away, so I'll leave this right here. Let's just say it was obviously written by a man. I was caught off guard by the ending and that's rare for me. All in all, the book is good but not great.

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