

BOOKS. Riding the Streets of Utica

Fred Gardaphe (July 15, 2016)



The actual unsolved murder of one Fred Morelli, whose immigrant father had his cigar business busted by the state for withholding sales tax, an act that drives Fred to the dark side of Italian power.

The third installment of [Frank Lentricchia](#) [2]'s [Eliot Conte](#) [3] mystery series, following *The Accidental Pallbearer* and [The Dog Killers](#). [4] finds the ex-professor turned private eye a stay-at-home father to a newborn daughter. Baby Ann, the result of his cohabitation with Catherine Cruz, is in his care and keeps him at his wit's end.

Without much of a track record in the father business, Eliot struggles to keep the kid fed, in clean diapers, and not crying as he muddles around his Utica home, waiting for Catherine to return from a visit to her older daughter.

When he gets a call from Caruso's Café telling him the news, he begins to sizzle. Victor Bocca, a local lout and angry old man smashed the guitarofone Angel Moreno, after the seventeen year old uses



this new gift from his adopted father Eliotto amuse Utica's Golden Boys, local retirees, as they debate the most famous unsolved crime in Utica history, the 1947 murder of Fred Morelli.

Assumed all along to be a mob hit, Angel ruins the old men's theories as he presents evidence he's managed to get through use of his superhuman skills as a computer hacker that links Morelli to none other than Thomas E. Dewey, the famous New York crime fighter turned politician. Angel, home from college, must have struck a wrong chord for Bocca to have behaved so violently, and leaves the café to sulk in his room.

Eliot seeks vengeance for the wrong done to his son, but before he can enact whatever physical response his twisted mind can conceive, he finds Victor's body sprawled over his front stoop; someone more professionally prepared than Eliot, got there first, yet Eliot will be suspected of the crime until he can prove he had nothing to do with it.

With this plot, Lentricchia takes us on another wild ride through the streets of Utica, New York, as wild man Eliot, part Sherlock Holmes, more Dirty Harry, flits about town in an effort to keep his family alive and together. Angel, whose family was murdered in the last novel, now is Eliot's charge.

Taking care of a newborn, and this genius computer whiz home from the Ivy League school that awarded him a major in computer science before he even takes a class, is more than Eliot can handle. Under the stress, he drifts toward the old habits that got the best of him in the past, and keeps him from finding normal work.

Lentricchia has centered this novel around an actual unsolved murder of one Fred Morelli, whose immigrant father had his cigar business busted by the state for withholding sales tax, an act that drives Fred to the dark side of Italian power. With punchy dialogue and fast-paced action, Lentricchia keeps the story moving and the plot from giving itself away. His sleuth is someone you love to hate and are afraid to love, and yet, you can't help but wonder just how will Eliot get out of this one. While the solution is ingenious, the action makes us think, could this be the end of Lentricchia's detective work?

What could Eliot Conte possibly do next if he must stay in Utica as he reaches the age when health problems arrive unexpectedly to normal seniors, not to mention those who are trouble magnets. And just how much mystery can even a powerful writer such as Lentricchia draw from one small American city?

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