

Burglars Can't Be Choosers: A Bernie Rhodenbarr Mystery

by Lawrence Block



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Reviews of the **Burglars Can't Be Choosers: A Bernie Rhodenbarr Mystery** by Lawrence Block

Datrim

I have long been a fan of Lawrence Block. One of his creations, Bernie Rhodenbarr, is my personal favorite. Bernie is a New York City based book store owner and part time thief who excels in lock picking and breaking and entering, and who loves the thrill it provides. He served time in prison in his youth, and since then has resolved to avoid getting caught again. **BURGLERS CAN'T BE CHOOSERS** is the first of eleven comic mystery adventures featuring this protagonist, a man with a nimble wit that keeps the reader chuckling.

Bernie's burglary operations are usually well-planned and tidily executed, from the initial surveillance of the target site to the escape route afterwards. However, during the course of some of these his burglaries Bernie encounters a dead body, usually just before the police arrive to investigate a called-in murder thereby forcing him to tackle solving the murder in order to clear his name. His investigative techniques include not only interviewing the victim's associates, but visits (sometimes involving illegal entry) to their homes to identify (and occasionally plant) evidence. The regulars in Bernie's life include Carolyn, his lesbian confidant and intermittent partner in crime, Ray Kirschmann an NYPD detective who overlooks many of Bernie's misdeeds if his palm is crossed with enough silver, Bernie's lawyer Wally Hemphill, and a cat named Raffles who resides in the bookstore.

Written with a master's hand, readers who enjoy smart writing and snappy patter should give this book a shot. It's definitely a great way to spend a lazy afternoon.

Tane

Lawrence Block is a fine writer, but most of his stuff is too dark, intense, and violent for me. Maybe he occasionally needs a break from gloom and horror, too. Starting in 1977, he wrote a series of eleven books about burglar/detective Bernie Rhodenbarr and they are pure fun and wit. Sometimes Bernie is referred to as a "gentleman burglar" (a la the famous "Raffles") but he's not all that much of a gentleman. He's just a boy from a hum-drum, middle-class family who became fascinated with locks at a very early age. From there it was an easy step to discovering the adrenaline rush of being where you're not supposed to be. Of out-witting the rule-makers.

Not that Bernie always has things his own way. Once he failed to make certain that an apartment was empty and was handed over to police by an enraged (and armed) householder. Bernie doesn't like guns or guard dogs or criminals or violence of any sort. His time in prison taught him a valuable lesson. Don't get caught!

In this first book, Bernie has (uncharacteristically) accepted an "assignment" from a shady character to break into an apartment and steal a small box. It seems like a piece of cake until the police arrive and Bernie is caught with a dead body. On the run, he's forced to solve the murder to escape being convicted for committing it. Fortunately, the analytical mind that has made him a successful burglar turns out to be perfect for amateur detective work. He's ably assisted by a new, rather mysterious female friend and a cop who has an interesting take on the word "honest."

It's fun, but it's also a fascinating look at the "Big Apple" where people must learn a unique set of survival skills. A generation before Block, people read Rex Stout's Nero Wolf series for its portrayal of every day life in New York City. Bernie, also, is a New Yorker and his story is driven by the realities of life in a huge, complex city. I read one of this series years ago (a library copy?) and was happy to be able to pick up the beginning books in Kindle versions. If you like good writing, complications, and humor, you can't beat Block and Bernie.

Whitestone

This book is a winning effort by established author, Lawrence Block. This is the first of a very original series featuring, the unlikely hero. Bernie Rhodenbarr. Bernie is an average nice guy, liked and respected by scores of folks. He is low key, unassuming and has a quiet manner. But Bernie has a BIG secret---he's a burglar and a quite successful one too. He enjoys breaking and entering, outsmarting locks and deadbolts where he shouldn't be and just gets a thrill of taking what is not his. He loves his personal claim that there isn't a lock he can't pick. In this first caper, he goes against his personal creed of choosing his own jobs and enters an apartment in NY City. Acting on a tip to relieve an off-Broadway talent manager of his valuables, Bernie fails to notice a dead body on the premises! After being caught in the apartment by the cops, who discover the body, he realizes that he was set up. Soon he is on the lam and with the help of an attractive young lady, he finds the real killer. Somehow (with pure talent) Lawrence Block has managed not only to introduce Bernie and flesh out his character, he has also managed to present a really good story line with humor. A very amusing tale has been spun and wait until you meet Bernie! You won't be disappointed!

Coron

I read this series when it was first published and thought I would see how the books held up. While Block is an excellent writer and this series was well received I was disappointed by this book. The fact that the plot depended on one highly improbable coincidence after another really put me off.

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