



Eyes of the Innocent

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Carter Ross, the sometimes-dashing investigative reporter for the *Newark Eagle-Examiner*, is back, and reporting on the latest tragedy to befall Newark, New Jersey, a fast-moving house fire that kills two boys.

With the help of the paper's newest intern, a bubbly blonde known as "Sweet Thang," Carter finds the victims' mother, Akilah Harris, who spins a tale of woe about a mortgage rate reset that forced her to work two jobs and leave her young boys without child care. Carter turns in a front-page feature, but soon discovers Akilah isn't what she seems. And neither is the fire.

When Newark councilman Windy Byers is reported missing, it launches Carter into the sordid world of urban house-flipping and Jersey-style political corruption. With his usual mix of humor, compassion, and street smarts, Carter is soon calling on some of his friends—gay Cuban sidekick Tommy Hernandez, T-shirt-selling buddy Tee Jamison, and on-and-off girlfriend Tina Thompson—for help in tracking down the shadowy figure behind it all.

Brad Parks's debut, *Faces of the Gone*, won the Shamus Award and Nero Award for Best American Mystery. It was heralded as an engaging mix of Harlan Coben and Janet Evanovich. Now Parks solidifies his place as one of the brightest new talents in crime fiction with this authentic, entertaining thriller.

Eyes of the Innocent Details

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From Reader Review Eyes of the Innocent for online ebook

Karen says

I really enjoy reporter protagonists.

I have met this author at Left Coast Crime events and cannot stop myself from picturing him as Carter Ross.

The voice of Carter is a delight. He throws in funny observations which I just cannot stop guffawing about.

This episode was about the arson of a house with two little boys inside. The investigation also uncovered a city Councilman with wandering sexual appetite and a disreputable local entrepreneur who rehabs and flips houses which include balloon mortgages and other dastardly deeds.

Carter also has to deal with a well connected female intern at work, who decides he is the best thing since sliced bread. His other workers also provide a great deal of diversity and talent.

I borrowed a copy of this from the public library.

Ami says

3.75 stars rounded up

The stereotype of bubbly-ditzy-twenty-year-old-blonde -- who got into the newspaper business because of her "Daddy" was so, SO VERY annoying!! Plus the blonde girl was called SWEET THANG the whole way through! My patience was running low every single time she talked. I thought the characterizations were worse than Faces of the Gone.

Having said that, the mystery was actually better. It started with a burned house that claimed two boys of Akilah Harris. Then it turned out that Akilah was not as innocent as she seemed. Then there was a slightly complicated connection between the burned house, a missing councilman, and house-flipping business. So the mystery definitely engaged me until the very end.

In addition, I felt that Carter Ross actually did some digging and investigating this time, rather than just by stroke of luck. He put on his thinking cap, finding ways to find clues about the missing councilman and what it had to do with Akilah's burned house. I enjoyed that part.

So, in conclusion, I loved it a mystery -- but it definitely did not win my votes for likeable characters. I seriously hope that Sweet Thang disappeared in the next book. I just couldn't stand her (nor the stereotyping).

Laurie says

I think I read this book because some New Jersey magazine recommended it. The story takes place in

Newark and the author used to be a reporter in Jersey. For a guy who used to be a reporter writing about a guy who is a reporter, you'd think that this book would be spotless when it comes to punctuation and spelling errors. Not so. Don't have your main character get huffy about a grammar error if you can't fix the errors in your story. I'm a stickler about errors in books, especially because it seems like sloppy editing is all book publishers do these days. But I digress...

The story is pretty interesting. A woman's house burns down, killing her two young boys who were trapped inside. But is the woman telling the truth? Was the fire an accident or arson? And what is up with the missing city councilman? Are these two incidents connected? It kept me guessing through to the end, however, I probably wasn't thinking that hard about it because I was so distracted by how annoying some of the characters (mainly the female characters) were. Sweet Thang, real name Lauren, is a pretty young intern who flirts her way into getting information and whines and has a Jersey City apartment that her rich daddy paid for. Then there's Tina who (I didn't read the first book in this series, so I don't really know much of the background) apparently wants the main character, Carter Ross, to sleep with her so she can get pregnant. Uhm, okay? Can we get some normal female characters, please?

There were also lots of cliches, the kind you'd expect to read in a mystery novel such as this.

Lynn says

Many have written a short synopsis of the book already so I want to write what I like about this series. First of all, it is at times laugh out loud funny. Ross Carter is an investigative reporter for a Newark newspaper and his take on daily things is humorous and refreshing. However, he shows himself to be a thoughtful and compassionate person. He doesn't take himself too seriously but does his job very well. When many people would think their job is done, he keeps investigating when something doesn't see right.

Another thing I realized as I was reading, Ross being an investigating reporter is refreshing after reading so many detective books. At one time when he was in a dangerous situation all he had for defense were fingernail clippers. Of course, he didn't try to use them but had mentioned he didn't carry a gun being that he was a reporter not a policeman.

The newspaper co-workers to his boss who doesn't use vowels when he talks are interesting, unique characters who you want to read about in the upcoming books. Carter Ross is a likable compassionate and funny person who would be fun to know. I should mention also that it was a visual book for me from the descriptions in the book. I could see Maury's Pawn Shop and the neighborhoods of Newark. I could see Sweet Thang (an intern) chatting away to people and baking banana bread. It was a fun read.

Back

Nancy says

I discovered Brad Parks when I won a copy of *The Girl Next Door: A Mystery* in a goodreads giveaway. I really enjoyed it. Once I figured out it was the third book in a series, I got my hands on the first two. The first book in the series, *Faces of the Gone*, was a bit of a disappointment, but *Eyes of the Innocent* almost matches *The Girl Next Door: A Mystery*. It is fast paced and entertaining. The mystery is nothing special but the characters Parks develops are fun even though most of them are almost cardboard cutout stereotypes. I can't put my finger on what brings these characters to life, but Parks pulls it off. It is a fun read.

Hannah says

The central character, Carter Ross, is a Preppy reporter for the Newark Eagle-Examiner. You can't help but fall in love with him: his humble attitude, ethical approach to life, and "Knight in Shining Armor" attitude all contribute to that! I met Brad Parks last year when he rescued our Friends of the Library by filling in as our Weekend with a Writer speaker @ practically the last minute! Brad is so charming, and his writing is so good, it's difficult not to see the similarities between Brad and Carter Ross! I have loved both of Brad's books thus far, and can't wait for the next one!

Cheryl says

Investigative reporter, Carter Ross is back. Carter writes for the Newark Eagle –Examiner. Carter's boss wants Carter to write about the dangers of space heaters, after a house fire that killed two young boys. Carter is being paired with the newest intern, Lauren McMillan aka Sweet Thang.

Akilah Harris is the boys' mother. At first glance she seems like a devastated mother but there is more to Akilah than meets the eye. Carter would have brushed Akilah off but when councilman, Windy Byers goes missing, Carter's investigative instincts kick in.

It is not often that when I read a book I am in agreement with the press on their praises about an author or book. In this case they have it right. When I first read *Faces of the Gone*, I knew Mr. Parks was someone to be watching. It is easy to see why Carter is considered the best in the business. He is tough as nails and has a cynical way about him that I like. Of course living in Newark, I would expect nothing less. Carter and Sweet Thang actually made a good pair. They meshed well together. It is amazing what Carter will do to get a story. I found all the characters intriguing. The story line was fast paced. *Eyes of the Innocent* will blow you away! This book will have you falling in love with mystery/suspense thrillers all over again.

Melissa says

I wonder what it would be like if Carter ever met Stephanie Plum?

Viccy says

Carter Ross sticks with the newspaper business even though it is falling down around him. He writes for the

Newark Eagle-Examiner, doing whatever the editor tells him to do, so he heads off to write a space heater story about a burned down house that killed two little boys. What he finds is a lot bigger than that. Stuck with one of the interns, Carter takes her along and they find the homeowner in the kitchen of the burned out house. Lauren charms Akilah Harris into telling them her story: the house was owned by a city councilman who was Akilah's boyfriend. Then everything comes crashing down. Turns out the city councilman was on the gift to a Brazilian developer and a lot of people got in the way. Fast-paced and snarky, just how I like my mysteries.

Judy Pietrobono says

Definitely liked this book! Main character, Carter Ross, is a newspaper reporter for a large Newark newspaper and ends up working on a story relating to the death of a city councilman. Colorful characters, good plot. Need to get the rest of the Carter Ross books in my library so I can read them all. As a former journalist may be slightly biased, but who doesn't like a good mystery set in Jersey?!

Deborah Robb says

Totally enjoyed this 2nd Carter Ross mystery. Carter Ross is an investigative reporter with a local newspaper and once again gets in deep while investigating a fire that burns down a house with two small children in it. The mystery starts with his interview of the mom of the two little boys and it goes downhill from there. A local politician goes missing and is found dead, the paperwork for the burned down house can't be found at the courthouse, the mom of the two little boys disappears...it's a fast paced book. The cast of characters from book #1 (Sweet Thang, Tommy, etc.) are back and the book is a great read.

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Carter Ross, investigative reporter

SETTING: Newark, NJ

SERIES: #3 of 2

RATING: 3.5

Carter Ross is an investigative reporter for the Newark Eagle-Examiner. Although he's one of the best writers in the office, his assignments are often at the whim of the owner. When a major fire occurs in which two young boys are killed, he's told to focus on writing about space heaters, although that appliance had no part in the situation. Accompanied by an attractive young intern he is mentoring, Lauren "Sweet Thang" McMillan, they interview the boys' mother. The story she tells them wipes all thoughts of space heaters out of the picture. But that story turns out to be nowhere near the truth.

Their initial investigation into the fire turns into a search for a missing councilman and a review of mortgage practices in Newark. It turns out that Sweet Thang has a natural ability to make an interviewee feel comfortable enough to share their most intimate secrets. It was interesting to see the differences among the boys' mother, her mother and her sister, each of whom represent a different strata of Newark society.

One of the major strengths of the first book in the series, *FACES OF THE GONE*, was the depiction of Newark. I didn't get nearly as much of a sense of place in *EYES*. However, Parks does a good job in developing Carter Ross; his own background as a reporter enables him to write convincingly of what is involved in that career. Ross is a character who is easy to like; he has a self-deprecating sense of humor that lightens what could be the grim nature of the job. Some of the other characters weren't quite as well portrayed. The paper's editor, Tina Thompson, is desperate to become pregnant and has selected Carter as the impregnator—that thread really didn't hold up too well for a second book. And to nickname a competent female reporter “Sweet Thang” seemed somehow demeaning to her and her talents, even if she was at times a bit of an airhead.

EYES OF THE INNOCENT is a solid sophomore effort. Although I preferred the first book, I did enjoy *EYES* quite a bit and am look forward to seeing where Parks will take Carter in the third book of the series, *THE GIRL NEXT DOOR*.

Betsy Ashton says

Brad Parks delivers a character as funny as Stephanie Plum. Carter Ross, investigative reporter at the Newark Eagle-Examiner, shows up at a house fire where two boys died. At first he thinks this is a tragedy, two kids home alone, single mother working to put food on the table. He meets the boys' mother who should be a professional storyteller for all the lies she weaves.

When Ross is assigned a perky, blond intern nicknamed Sweet Thang, he hands her a research project to check out whether or not the woman's story is true. It unravels just before the paper is to go to press with the heart-tugging story. Ross tries to stop it, because Sweet Thang has uncovered some of the woman's lies.

The story underlying the lies becomes so delicious that Ross can't stop investigating. Add the disappearance of a city councilman, rumors of corruption in house flipping and downright hilarious political corruption and you have a book that will keep you turning pages until the last one. And then you'll want more.

To be transparent, I know Brad Parks. I know he's funny, profane, zany -- just like his main character. So, is Carter Ross really a thinly disguised Brad Parks? You'll have to ask him. My money is on "yes."

Cathy Cole says

I found Brad Parks' third Carter Ross book, *The Girl Next Door*, such a wonderful blend of mystery, humor, heart, and character that I went back to the beginning of the series so I wouldn't miss a thing. It's taking me entirely too long to catch up, but I'm enjoying every page that Parks writes.

Interpersed throughout the book are a few short chapters told from the bad guy's point of view, and although they're not entirely necessary, they do show readers just what Ross is up against. We also get a real feel for working in a newsroom, with an editor who's perfected speech without the use of vowels (should I worry that I seem able to understand the man so easily?), and a boss who has a thing about space heaters. The one and only thing about this series that I can do without is the presence of another editor, Tina, whose biological

clock has convinced her that Carter is the one-and-only sperm donor for her. Her behavior has gotten very old, very quickly, and I'm secretly hoping her clock implodes.

One of the things I love best about this series is Carter Ross's heart. As he looks at a photograph and into the eyes of two little dead boys, he knows he's going to do whatever it takes to find justice for them-- even if he is armed only with a pair of nail clippers. Carter Ross treats everyone he meets with respect, and that has to have a great deal to do with the stories he manages to root out.

It is so much fun to watch Carter, Sweet Thang, and fellow reporter Tommy piece all the clues to this mystery together. Sweet Thang (perhaps I should call her by her name, Lauren!) isn't the bubble-headed, bodacious bimbo that everyone thinks she is, and she actually shows quite a bit of potential as a reporter. In the midst of heart-warming moments, laugh-out-loud funny lines,

and downright scary scenes, we also get to learn quite a bit about corruption in the real estate market. If I didn't already have a house bought and paid for, I'd almost be tempted to live in a lean-to out in the woods rather than buy a house now....

There must be something in the water in New Jersey because that state has turned out some mighty fine writers with just the right combination of smarts, compassion, and humor that keep me coming back for all their books. You want a name or two? Chris Grabenstein. Jeff Cohen. Harlan Coben. And never, ever forget Brad Parks. If you don't already, you're going to love Carter Ross as much as I do.

Tim The Enchanter says

Excellent Second Effort - 3.5 Stars

Posted to The Literary Lawyer

The wise cracking, ultra white WASP who loves pleated slacks is back. He is once again surrounded with a gang of colorful characters from Tommy, the gay Cuban (former) intern to "sweet thang" the young blond intern with ties to the papers and the ability to make a mean loaf of banana bread. While the plot lacked the finesse of the first novel, Eyes of the Innocent is an occasionally humorous crime thriller for any fan of Investigative Journalism.

Plot summary

Investigative Journalist Carter Ross is tasked with writing a story surrounding an apartment fire that took the lives of two young boys. Carter learns that the mother of the two boys was not present at the time of the fire and the underage boys were left to fend for themselves as their mom worked two jobs. Across town a parallel storyline develops as a prominent city councillor goes missing without a trace. The stories collide as Carter follows a trail of deception, murder, bribery, sub-prime mortgages and shady business men.

The Good

5 Stars for Style

Brad Parks employs a entertaining writing style that interposes humour with human tragedy and thrills. While it wasn't as humorous as his first installment, the author used many humorous quips as well as developing a string of entertaining and colorful characters. The characters keep you smiling while teetering dangerously on the edge of becoming caricatures. As he often exploits stereotypes in humorous ways, I can imagine this could become tiresome five books into the series.

Human Interest Story with every Novel

Brad Parks writes a journalism story with a journalists eyes. Within his novels he provides an interesting look at the victims of crime. He presents them as normal people often times with their own problems, demons and histories. Its as if the reader is watching the unfolding of a human interest story within the context of the novel as a whole. Additionally, the author deal with some of the issues that these characters would deal with. In this novel there is a look a predatory mortgages and the unregulated house flipping industry. This serves to provide a human background to the stories and provide a sense of realism.

The Bad

These Evils Geniuses Aren't So Smart

If there is one thing the author could improve its the quality of his bad guys. On one hand, the bad guys are portrayed as real people. We get to know the bad guys with short chapters that give us some background and show us how they became what they are. My issue is that these bad guys aren't nearly as smart as they made out to be. They are often involved in schemes with obvious holes that are bound to suck them in and destroy them. Realistically, there are few evil geniuses in the world but in the last two novels (but especially this one) they come off as a bit dumb in the way they clearly overreach. In this novel, the bad guy wasn't nearly as interesting. We knew he was in the background but he had little involvement in the story until the end. Fortunately the rest of the story was interesting.

Final Thoughts

Overall, this installment featured a weaker plot. While the author repeated some of the plot devices from his award winning first novel, they were not used with the same effectiveness. Fortunately, the dialogue continues to be top notch, the characters entertaining and the actually investigation realistic. While a tad disappointing after the stellar first book, I will most definitely be reading the next installment.

Content Advisories

It is difficult to find commentary on the sex/violence/language content of book if you are interested. I make an effort to give you the information so you can make an informed decision before reading. *Disclaimer* I do not take note or count the occurrences of adult language as I read. I am simply giving approximations.

Scale 1 - Lowest 5 - Highest

Sex - 2.5

There is significant sexual tension between a few characters. There is a "tweet" that implies the desire for sexual activity and a scene in which two characters prepare to have sex but ultimately back off. None of this is graphic in nature.

Language - **2.5**

All use of adult language is mild in nature. There is some mild profanity but overall the language is appropriate for most ages.

Violence - **2.5**

There is no graphic violence. There is investigation of a crime in which children have died in a fire, a gun related murder, a nail gun related murder and a scene where a character has their arm forcefully broken. There is less violence than the average crime novel.
