



The End of the Night

John D. MacDonald

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A journey into a world of fear and violence carried to their logical extreme—murder.

The End of the Night Details

Date : Published December 12th 1971 by Fawcett (first published 1960)

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Author : John D. MacDonald

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From Reader Review The End of the Night for online ebook

Peter Sidell says

Excellent character development along with well developed and maintained suspense. A bit of looking into the past, and John MacDonald's philosophizing is fun. Worth rereading

Judith says

After I read that Stephen King deemed this a book worth re-reading, and Dean Koontz raved about the author, I put it on my list where it has languished for 3 years. When I finally got around to it, I was completely captivated. This is one of the scariest books I have ever read, and the first book since Salem's Lot (some 30 years ago) that actually gave me nightmares. It's not scary in a vampire/horror story way (although who can really be scared of vampires anymore since we have Twilight and True Blood which provide us with vampire romance and porn). It's scary in a No Country for Old Men by Cormac McCarthy way, which is to say, there is nothing more frightening in the world than a close-up picture of real evil.

A young foursome go across the country on a killing spree and are inevitably caught and punished. While it may seem at first glance that this story is as old as the Bible, the author brings something unique to this work which got under my skin so much that I felt like I was there with them, as both victim and perpetrator. And even though I finished the book, the characters are dancing around in my head. It's not one of those books you wish had kept on going, but still, I do miss the book now that it's over.

wally says

17 dec 14, wednesday evening

#9 from macdonald for me...give or take..."powerful, fast-paced...a smasheroo." saturday review. heh! who can pass up a smasheroo? i certainly can't...count me in!

has this quote on the title page...*an execution is a very serious thing, and around here we do our level best to have it go smooth and quick, and we try to do it with some dignity too.* --warden durkin g. shires

story begins: [with a letter...to ed from willy] *dear ed, well, we had the big day here, and we sent the four of them off to their reward with what satchel-butt shires, our loveable warden called "splendid efficiency." honest to god, if you'd still been here, you would have split a gut watching shires sweat blood around here as burning day got closer and closer.*

okee dokee then, as the good doctor said...onward and upward.

update, 18 dec 14, thursday noon

wanted to note some similarities to my previous macdonald read, Flash of Green...a victim of the wolf pack...helen wister...shares some of the same characteristics/actions as natalie sinnat in flash of green. helen is newly-engaged and though natalie was never engaged in flash, they both engage in premarital sex with a

young man of their choice...and then they move aware from that behavior, helen after becoming engaged...by mutual agreement...and natalie and jigger...due in part because natalie knew that what she had with jigger would not last...her time w/jigger was to-do w/pity...or simple basic need. thought it curious...makes me wonder where macdonald stood on the matter, if he had a stance. too, both helen and natalie have twin brothers.

a note on the narration, the telling

story begins with the letter to ed from willy. short, maybe 4-5 pages, and then there is a shift and the narration is provided through deems owen, defense lawyer...this shift in chapter two...much of it, the telling, having been recorded by leah slayter, on deems owen's staff.

later the same day

okay...so macdonald here uses a variety of narrative techniques. chapter 3 was the *death house diary*...or, a portion of kirby palmer stassen's diary. he is asking himself why and how and narrates what happened before he met the other three in a beer joint in del rio. chapter four begins...this one is another of riker deems owen's memorandums...i s'pose a kind of diary, lawyer's diary...but macdonald switches it up, the telling, hey?

later still

that is chapter 4...riker's memorandum...followed by 5, helen's story...straight-forward narrative not credited to any of the characters, 3rd person...and six is another death house diary 1st person eye-narrator through kirby's eyes. looking ahead...the patterns seems to repeat...will note any changes.

time place scene setting

- *a prison, as yet unnamed
- * the wister family home
- * monroe, the friendly city
- * saturday, july 25th
- * the club...where helen/others play tennis
- * route 813...somewhere on the east coast, new england, close to maryland...where arnold and helen take a drive
- * arnold's olds
- * a frat house/ kirby...unnamed university
- * kirby's impala...new york city...a frat friend's apartment
- * a bar/restaurant, nyc...here, macdonald does not name the place and i think the telling suffers...almost forgot it, this 'place' cause of that
- * a big two-year-old chrysler imperial...of john pinelli/kathy keats
- * various restaurants, cabs, hotels
- * kirby's diary is "last february" and continuing
- * 2nd floor of a frat house on woodland avenue
- * the new york apartment of kirby's frat friend...gabe shevlan...somewhere near 77th and 2nd
- * 18 burgess lane, huntstown (kirby sends a suitcase there)
- * woman's prison a hundred miles away...where nan koslov is kept
- * garage on 44th, nyc...kirby parks his impala there
- * the absinthe on west 48th, nyc
- * west of montgomery, alabama...kirby, john/kathy...on way to mexico
- * laredo...they cross into mexico here
- * a barn on route 813...the road nearby...the ditch
- * deggsburg...ruth is from daggsburg
- * the continental hilton, mexico city

- * the francis, acapulco...sanborn's
- * the house of man named hillary charis (mexico city)
- * sidewalk cafe, airport, acapulco, mexico
- * bassette, nebraska...nanette's family settled here from poland via west germany
- * san francisco...los angeles...nanette's past
- * 3rd floor monroe national bank building...fbi sets up office there
- * falls church...herbert's wife, kids there
- * meeker county...the scene of the action, helen/arnold
- * glasgow, kentucky...plumbing contractor's vehicle stolen here
- * tupelo, mississippi...wolf pack passed through here, too
- * grill room of the hotel riggs
- * 430 miles north northeast of monroe in western pennsylvania seven mile lake
- * lakeshore cottages (wolf pack stays a night)
- * chubby's grill on route 90
- * bracketville, 30 miles away
- * the paradise cabins
- * lupkin...texas i think...eldorado, arkansas
- * a private club in arkansas
- * shadyside motor hotel...last place the wolf pack stayed before they were brought down
- * laughlintown, pennsylvania...near the jersey border...wolf pack arrested here at a stop close to the pike or right on it
- * pennsylvania turnpike, station #22 at morgantown

characters

- * shires, warden
- * ed, to whom the letter is addressed...that opens the story...the reader gets the sense worked at the prison where the executions took place...that he knows the names that
- * willy writes the letter to ed
- *the wolf pack:**
 1. nanette koslov
 2. kirby palmer stassen, whose family has money hires deems owen the lawyer
 3. robert "shack" hernandez
 4. sander golden
 - * from the letter: creepy staples, bongo, christy & brewer, doc, old mitch, marano & sid, cops, politicians, official witnesses, the father (a priest), mabel...will's wife...and finally willy
 - * riker deems owen...attorney hired by the stassens to defend kirby...acts as defense for other three, as well
 - * miriam, owen's wife
 - * walter stassen & his wife, ernestine, parents of kirby stassen
 - * salesman in uvalde
 - * helen wister, 23, newly-engaged, to be married, has a job in city hall
 - * jane wister, helen's mother
 - * dr. paul wister, father of helen
 - * dallas kemp...to marry helen, & he is an architect, 26 years old, has his own architect's office...established there three years
 - * he has an elder sister in denver, married, two children
 - * he has one draftsman and one secretary
 - * his parents are in venice, florida
 - * evans...just a name...helen can see the evans house
 - * arnold crown, owns and operates a gas station, has his eye on another, is infatuated w/helen, follows...is

described as a classic stalker

* a guy w/a station over on division...station for possible sale to arnold

* francine & joe...w/whome helen/dallas play doubles tennis

* gabe shevlan, frat friend who graduated a year earlier, in new york...works for cbs...kirby is permitted to stay at his apartment.

* pete mchue, a senior, frat brother and roommate of kirby

* toccata chavez...apparently a composer?

* claire booth lane and her daughter...someone famous?

* a dumpy little girl in a red sweater

* hemingway...and his *nada* word...from the story

* doris day...she is on the radio as kirby listens

* mugsy spinoza...imaginary man sentenced to die in kirby's diary

* one of the guards (death row...and here macdonald does not provide a name in kirby's diary...seems to be a failing...surely a name would have been known...but only a description)

* 11 of 20 cells (death row...although that word isn't used...don't believe

* imaginary martian (kirby's diary)

* aztecs virigins (same)

* john pinelli...portrayed as a washed up director in kirby's diary

* kathy keats...john's actress wife

* betsy kipp...kirby's friend gabe and her are an item

* cab drivers

* a man with a spanish guitar

* stud browning, a producer...kirby's diary

* doxie weese, gabe and betsy set up kirby w/this woman who cries often

* the burmans...john and kathy are staying in their apartment

* the wrong man at the agency...kirby said qqc...sent packing

* a friend...drove john's car east...presumably from california

* a boy who brought the ice...to john/kathy's motel room

* hayes...huston...big hollywood names

* the sabine women...isn't there a painting...the rape of?

* proctor johnson, psychiatrist...supplies one possible explanation for the wolf pack

* george tibault, professor of sociology, monroe college...supplies another one

* horace becher...killed...perhaps the salesman in texas? yes...worked for the blue bonnet tile company out of houston

* sillier wives of clients (dallas)

* a girl he had known in school...dallas...he returns for conjugal visits...heh!

* marg...a client of dallas

* willie layton...possibly marg's husband...also a client

* the judlands...as in "the judland house"

* smitty...guy who works...probably mechanic, attendant...at arnold's service station

* customer...another customer...at gas station

* desk sergeant

* a drunk

* lieutenant lew razoner

* captain barney tauss, head of homicide

* technicians...a man in coveralls stood...a little man, doctor

* sheriff gustaf "gus" kurby

* the ambulance people

* a young couple, witnesses, howard craft and ruth meckland, engaged

* newsman...reporters...al/billy
* wroe news announcer radio
* tab hunter...as in...looked like...tab hunter is an actor, no?
* dietrich...a woman actress from ago?
* brown & barren *gente*...in mexico
* desk clerk...mexico
* a small boy...a kind of bellhop, mexico
* 2 girls from the university of texas/kirby, mexico
* hillary charis & wife...in montevideo...so kirby, john, kathy stay at their house in mexico city
* servants...armando and his wife...he is gardener...rosalinda/cook, and nadina, the girl maid
* pretty girls...kirby watches from a sidewalk cafe mexico city
* august sonninger & frank race...arrive w/john & kathy at airport
* "wilson"...name in script that kirby reads
* don ameche...a mexican policeman is described as looking like
* police...mexican police...another big mexican in a white linen jacket
* someone is described as looking like richard nixon
* from wade, joan and sonny...inscribed on .45 colt
* a family from sonora, texas...kirby hitches a ride...man, woman, two small children
* huckleberry finn...a little french strumpet w/a face like (nan)
* polish peasants
* nanette, one of several children...3 arrive from europe...3 more later
* nanette leaves home w/a migrant farm laborer
* a bohemian group in frisco (nan)...later, a painter in l.a.
* an f.b.i. team, 4 agents...3 more agents
* special agent in charge, f.b.i. herbert "bert" dunnigan
* agent graybo...agent stark
* 3 boys danville, virginia...find a dead blonde....thirty neurotic semi-psychotic (nuts who call police)
* amelia earhardt...woman aviator who disappeared
* idle boobs...who look, visit crime scenes...hysterical types...mystics and visionaries (nuts)
* walter james lokey iii, 3-year-old boy died when barn where witnesses were...collapsed 'cause of all the (nuts) inside...too many, weight, etc
* colonel blimp....? dunno
* ard stallings...head of surgery, monroe general hospital
* bess, his wife...2 children...truck driver who falls asleep
* joe randi and wife clara...operate lakesore cottages on 7 mile lake
* the shoelockers...will be arriving at cottages
* schiller's...store near 7 mile lake/cottages
* brubeck, milligan, jamal, debussy, wagner, liszt, chopin, bach, alessandro scarletti, antonio vivaldi, mozart
* 2 customers at the bar
* bartender...anold man in a stake truck...
* marianne crozier, paul beattie, fats carey, gussy ellison, kip mcallen (kirby's childhood past)
* william tell...the marching chinese...the rangers (texas)
* a pump jockey in seguin...a woman from crystal city, texas...another truck driver
* a couple was making love in the back seat
* blonde in a red satin housecoat
* mr and mrs ivan sanderson, mr theodore sturgeon, mr kenneth tynan...alias used by kirby to register motel
* mort sahl
* reverend....governor
* perceptive spectators...communications people (trial)

* john quain, prosecutor in case
* darrow (famous attorney)
* loeb-leopold case
* roddy springs...a deputy under gus
* mason ives...a newsman...friendly with gus...a kind of foil
* peterson...tv person/man...known to gus
* ralph weaver...his wife, pearl, instrumental in bringing the wolf pack down
* a half-wit woman...a neighbor boy (pearl)
* mr & mrs j.d. smith, mr. w.j. thompson, mr h johnson, the last aliases kirby signs them in under...at the shadyside motor hotel
* michael bruce hallowell/ carl lartch...huh? didn't get this...two names to describe one man, a reader...and he comes across the body of helen...and is instrumental in the fall of the wolf pack...near laughlintown, pennsylvania
* various cops...at the end...one tackles golden...one puts a gun in shack's face...two handcuff kirby as he receives an order of burgers...several handcuff nan as she exits the restroom
* mr. barlow...kirby uses this name to helen when she asks how it happened..."you wanna buy me another drink before we go upstairs, mr. barlow?" pretending to be a young girl raped by an uncle and a runaway...hmmmm. often...macdonald's stories have at least one strange element...this is one...the double name above is another.

the list is about 99% complete...mencken isn't listed...a frisco reporter...one poet w/red handlebar mustachios...the samaritan, the good one...louie in dago someone nan and golden knew...lots!

a quote

our novelists seem to write of physical love as though they were under some obligation either to acquaint a herd of martians with the fleshy facts, or to compose a handbook for the inexperienced.

update, finished...19 dec 14, friday 11:38 a.m. e.s.t.

i'm tempted to mark this as a favorite...like the last macdonald story i read it's that good...Flash of Green, the last one i read. i could look at the numbers..."ratings/reviews"...try to get an idea how many read macdonald...to what end? he writes some really good stories. this one continued that narrative swap back and forth...death house diary of kirby...the owen memorandum...and the memorandum are introduced by an unknown 3rd person narrator. that is one thing to like about this...the method he used to tell the story...the story itself is another liking. curious, that *nashville* and what happened there never is told...the wolf pack..kirby, really...does not want to tell that and it is not told...though the...presumably murder/s there happened in between the first and the last. anyway...good read...i like the use of *barlow* at the end...and another review here suggests (to me) that perhaps stephen king found the name here in this story...and used it in the lot. maybe si maybe no.

Leah says

NOTE: The details about this book (listed above) are not accurate as of 10/12/11. This ISBN (0-449-13195-5) has 219 pages, is a Fawcett Gold Medal book, by Ballantine Books, published in 1966. Its first date of publication is 1960.

Now that that's out of the way :D

Whoa! ***The End of the Night* by John D. MacDonald** grabbed me from the first page and didn't let go until the last. What makes that so amazing? We know how the story ends from page one. Plus, this book was published in 1960 yet it felt totally relevant. I'm in awe. And talk about prolific...MacDonald wrote over 500 short stories and 78 books in 40 years! Man, how inspirational is that?

What MacDonald did so skillfully with this book was dig deeper than any crime thriller I've read to date. He brought up issues and questions and dilemmas I think about all the time. How many have not questioned the seeming randomness of tragic events? Asked why those events happened? Or asked how someone became a "monster" capable of such acts of pure "evil"? I daresay very few because humans by nature want everything to make sense. For there to be an easily explained motive.

I can't wait to read this book again. My full review is on my blog.

Carla Remy says

An extraordinary novel, detailed, crossing time and perspective (bad guys and good guys) to tell of a single but elaborate crime spree.

Barry Fulton says

Murder mystery? Not exactly a mystery as the execution of the Wolf pack members by electric chair is described in the first chapter. But, it is an astonishing description of the senseless and inevitable chain of events that leads to murder by four disparate characters. It is a book without heroes.

McDonald's writing is superb -- reminiscent of Scott Fitzgerald's Great Gatsby, where power, status, and opportunity clash.

John MacDonald, best known for his Travis McGee, should be recognized among the finest American novelists of the 20th century.

Paul says

Reminds me a little of An Orchid for Miss Blandish by James Hadley Chase.

Tony says

THE END OF THE NIGHT. (1960). John D. MacDonald. ***1/2.

This is a thriller from MacDonald written in a very different style from the other thrillers of his that I have previously read. The story starts out as we watch the electrocution of the four members, three men and one woman, of a gang dubbed 'The Wolf Pack' by members of the press. They had been captured after an extended chase by hundreds of police after committing crimes including rape, kidnapping, auto theft, and multiple murders. Their spree covered the southern states and ended up on the New Jersey Turnpike. Much

of their story is told by their defense attorney, whose avowed purpose was to obtain a sentence of life imprisonment vs. the death sentence. The background of each of the gang members was explored, but not emphasis was placed on their earlier lives – they all fit an established pattern. What we were left with was a group of people who had been reduced to pure evil, and didn't think twice about the acts that they had been forced to commit. The novel became one of a chase. There was no mystery, per se, since we were in on the executions early on. There was ample opportunity, however, for MacDonald to provide the rationale for each member's descent into hell. One big difference is that all the action occurs mostly along back roads; the interstate highways and turnpikes were all in the process of being built. There were no scenes on the water – MacDonald's usual setting for his action. If you are looking for a different side to the author's talent, this is the book you need to read. It was good, in a way, to have read this book without leaving and feeling as if you had sand in your shoes. Recommended.

jpm says

Un libro imperdibile per chi ha apprezzato A sangue freddo di Capote o le atmosfere inquietanti del film dei fratelli Cohen: Non è un paese per vecchi.

Un libro che ti lascia addosso un scia qualcosa, non è malessere, non è dolore e non è paura ma è quella sensazione 'impalpabile' di inquietudine che non riesci a decodificare ma che sai che c'è e lentamente, inesorabilmente si insinua dentro te.

Lynn says

The author made some interesting choices in writing this book. He opens with a death house guard's letter describing the spree killers' executions....so no mystery there. There are a couple of chapters that present the notes of the killers' defense attorney (these are introduced with snarky comments about his ego and possible relationship with his assistant). There are documentary-like chapters of law enforcement efforts and peripheral witness interaction with the killers. Only one of the four people who committed these motiveless murders gives testimony (in the form of a introspective diary). Many key characters reveal nothing about their motives and participation. Of course we cannot understand what happened....it was senseless. I also think it was a brilliant choice for John D. MacDonald. I know this is fiction, but I wonder if Truman Capote was influenced by this book.

James Love says

I have yet to find a bad John D. MacDonald novel. Even one that started out slowly is a treasure trove of fun. The experience of reading MacDonald brings back memories of reading a book under the covers with a flashlight late at night. The voice of your significant other saying please turn off the lights and go to sleep. And the tone of your own voice as you say, "Just let me finish this chapter." The realization that you started the book intending to read just a few pages before going to bed only to find out that it is 2 A. M. and you have read more than half the book.

This one is no exception. The style is like a true crime piece of non-fiction. A kind of In Cold Blood, Helter Skelter or Fatal Vision meets Robert Bloch's Psycho with a side order of the hipster bull\$#!+ made famous

by Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. A member of the Wolf Pack compared his crimes to a Sociologist conducting experiments for later class discussions.

Keith says

I mistakenly thought that this was one of the books on David Foster Wallace's teaching syllabus that circulated the 'nets a while back. So I put *The End of the Night* in the "intend to read" mental space, along with a few other books which were worthy of DFW's consideration for a semester-long course on writing. As fate would have it, I came across this book at the "take a book, but please leave a book" shelf at work. I stuffed it into my bag after reading random sentences. (I didn't please leave a book because I'm a moral degenerate.)

furthering this coincidence is the fact that this book in a lot of ways keeps pace with the last book I put down: Vladimir Nabakov's *Lolita*. Both are tales of restless insanity, and the cringe-worthy crime sprees that dot the landscape of otherwise squeaky clean America. Both novels lack any real setting, instead taking place in hotel rooms, parking lots and patches of discreet wooded areas. Both stories are received by the reader as post-hoc jailhouse confessions from the central character.

The End of the Night also has a bleak absurdity that rivals Nabakov's. I especially enjoyed a scene where townspeople congregate at the site of a murder and, like souvenirs, collect bits of grass and stray rocks which they gleefully imagine having been picked up by the murderer himself! They all climb into the loft of an old barn, where a local man witnessed the stabbing, and eventually it collapses, killing a small child and injuring dozens. *then the same people show up to collect the splinters of the barn.* ha! the dumb fascination and involvement of the masses is returned to throughout the story.

people have criticized McDonald's tendency to pontificate about justice, the human condition, morality, etc. but I think his ruminations manage to remain an essential aspect of Kirby's character, and not necessarily an indulgence of the author. The kid is sitting on death row, trying to finish a diary that will live on after him, I think it's natural to assume he'll get a little philosophical about the meaning of life. and it looks pretty tame compared to Humbert Humbert's bi-lingual orchestrations.

I can understand DF Wallace's fascination with *The End of the Night*. Its easy satire and strange violence are echoed in postmodern books of the 80's such as *White Noise* and *Less Than Zero*.

David says

Having recently read *Weep for Me* (1951), which John D. MacDonald identified as the worst of his early novels, I felt obligated to follow up by reading *The End of the Night* (1960), which was his favorite of the early books. *The End of the Night* chronicles the so-called Wolf Pack, three young men and a young woman who go on a cross-country crime spree. Given that JDM thought so highly of *The End of the Night*, I was expecting a great read. I did not stop to consider that there is a compelling reason for suspecting that JDM may not have been the best judge of his own work. To wit: Many readers, myself among them, find that JDM's novels are aging poorly because of his habit of interjecting sociological lectures into his narratives, and these are precisely the sections of his books that JDM liked the best. Therefore, I should not have been surprised to find that *The End of the Night* is dominated by a pair of pretentious first-person narrators, both

of whom are more interested in understanding the world than telling a story. Of course, this is not to say that noir fiction cannot be a vehicle for understanding the world—in fact, this is what distinguishes much of the best noir. But when JDM indulges his love of pontification, he fails to recognize that a well-told story can be not just a sufficient but a *superior* way of deepening readers' understanding of the world.

Roger says

THE END OF THE NIGHT

Ever since reading most of the Travis McGee mysteries, when I was a young man, I have thought John D. McDonald was an often over-looked treasure of an American writer. This early novel of his only strengthens that outlook.

This is a great read. It is so much better than it starts out. It begins with just two of the people who pay most dearly. The girl with her life and her man with his dream. We bump into the killers as all their victims seem to. Random, like this killing spree. It ends with the capture of these most ordinary of people who have become serial killers. The dumb brute of a man who lives in every town. The pretentious 'beatnik-philosopher' and the selfish sex hungry, adrenaline hungry girl, and the seemingly decent but bored rich kid. It ends with the almost unbearable pain of the man with a dream, whose simple desire to fulfill this dream of his has been shattered. Here is a short quote from this interesting and involving book:

"And there is this, too. We all--every one of us--walk very close to the shadows, to strange dark places, every day of our lives. No man stands in a perfectly safe place. So it is dangerously smug to say, I am immune. No one can tell when some slight chance, some random thing, may turn him slightly, just enough so that he will find that he is no longer in a safe place, and he had begun to walk into the shadows, toward unknown things that are always there, waiting to eat him." -John D. MacDonald

Kathrin Passig says

Vor zwanzig Jahren mochte ich John D. MacDonald, aber beim Wiederlesen habe ich mich über dieses Buch (und die Leseprobe von "The Last One Left") geärgert, vor allem, weil Frauen hier auf die blödestmögliche Weise nur Dekomaterial sind. Aber auch alle anderen Figuren bestanden aus aufeinandergestapelten Klischees. Gekauft, weil es technisch interessant anfing (Verbrechen von der Hinrichtung an rückwärts erzählt anhand von Briefen und Dokumenten), aber die vielversprechende Konstruktion zerfällt bald (Autor steckt dann eben doch überall mit drin, Täter tut ihm den Gefallen, im Gefängnis noch schnell alles auf feine literarische Art aufzuschreiben etc.)
