



A Good Month for Murder: The Inside Story of a Homicide Squad

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Bestselling author Del Quentin Wilber tells the inside story of how a homicide squad—a dedicated, colorful team of detectives—does its almost impossible job

Twelve homicides, three police-involved shootings and the furious hunt for an especially brutal killer—February 2013 was a good month for murder in suburban Washington, D.C.

After gaining unparalleled access to the homicide unit in Prince George's County, which borders the nation's capital, Del Quentin Wilber begins shadowing the talented, often quirky detectives who get the call when a body falls. After a quiet couple of months, all hell breaks loose: suddenly every detective in the squad is scrambling to solve one shooting and stabbing after another. Meanwhile, the entire unit is obsessed with a stone-cold "red ball," a high-profile case involving a seventeen-year-old honor student attacked by a gunman who kicked down the door to her house and shot her in her bed.

Murder is the police investigator's ultimate crucible: to solve a killing, a detective must speak for the dead. More than any recent book, *A Good Month for Murder* shows what it takes to succeed when the stakes couldn't possibly be higher.

A Good Month for Murder: The Inside Story of a Homicide Squad Details

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From Reader Review *A Good Month for Murder: The Inside Story of a Homicide Squad* for online ebook

Stacey says

I'm a true crime fan, so *A Good Month for Murder* could mean a few things, but it wasn't what I expected. Rather than focus on the murders, it's a look at those investigating the murders. It's not all cut and dry for these men and women. This is their job day in and day out, plus it's only a month! A great read.

Scott S. says

Because I **really** admired Wilber's first book *Rawhide Down: The Near Assassination of Ronald Reagan* - which is a very thorough account of the events on March 30, 1981 - I checked for any other works by the author.

Wilber's follow-up, *A Good Month for Murder*, is equally outstanding. This time he rides shotgun with the homicide detectives in Prince George's County, Maryland (which borders Washington D.C., and has a diverse population of just under one million) as they contend with the particularly violent month of February 2013. The squad investigates twelve murders along with other on-going and troublesome cases from the prior year.

I think this work deserves complimentary comparison to David Simon's tour de force *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (hands down one of my absolute favorite books of all time), and it was nice that Wilber even mentions / pays tribute to the obvious influence in his epilogue.

There is humor (the veteran detective tricking his rookie partner into thinking a female forensic investigator was formerly an exotic dancer . . . even more humorous because the forensic investigator plays along with the gag), there is tragedy (a young man is gunned down on a sidewalk in a robbery concerning new sneakers), there is good, dedicated police work by the eclectic investigators of the PGCPD. The 'job' is rarely pretty or easy - there are some damned depressing scenes - but these folks do it with a certain grace.

Angelique Simonsen says

this was the best nf crime book I've read for a while

Wanda says

A complete 180 from my usual cozy mystery. This has the fast-paced, in-depth feel of journalistic writing, no doubt because of the author's years as a newspaper reporter, and really does make you feel like you're right there on the scene of the crime or in the interrogation 'box' with the detectives. The author makes it clear he couldn't be with every detective on every case (a physical impossibility) but I wish he'd included more time with the female detectives in his coverage. Other than the one minor complaint, this is hands

down a winner.

Janice says

In a time when the police are under fire for their actions, this book shines a spotlight on the homicide squad of Prince George's County, Maryland. For one month, February 2013, Wilber follows the cases and the lives of the detectives who work the cases. The murders show how cheap life has become on the streets and the work it takes to "speak for the dead" and bring them justice. This is a fascinating book and shows just how rough being a police officer can be. Yes, there are some who are bad, but there are many more that work hard to see that justice is done. A fascinating book.

Joyce says

Journalist and crime reporter Del Quentin Wilber spent February, 2013, following the Prince George's County, Maryland, homicide squad, and the result is this compelling insider's view of the activities of an urban department, which involves "tons of tedious police work." The emphasis is on the people involved--detectives, victims, survivors, and perpetrators--and we get lots of biographical background. But there's also the scene of crime forensic detail, the endless bureaucracy and documentation, and the conversations with suspects, families and more. The pacing is relentless and filled with the day-by-day details; characterizations are vivid and authentic; the story line is immersive with a "you are there" feel; there's a strong sense of place; and the tone is sobering. Johnny Heller reads it in a matter of fact style, and his voice will remind listeners of old-time radio crime dramas. Informative, immersive, authentic.

Susan says

Covering one month (February 2013) in a busy homicide squad in Prince George's County, Maryland, this is a really compelling read. Prince George's County is a suburban sprawl of 900,000 people, which ranges from affluent areas to farmland and low income housing. The area averages at least ninety homicides a year (to put this in perspective I live in a large borough in North London with a population of approx 375,00 and, looking at the crime statistics, there have been 48 homicides here between 2000 and 2012, while 2015 saw 112 murders in the whole of London).

January 2013 saw a lull in homicides, but Lieutenant Billy Rayle said to his squad, "be ready for February. It will be a good month for murder." During this book we follow the squad as they investigate many crimes, including the murder of seventeen year old Amber Stanley, who the detectives investigating the crime feel was murdered by mistake – the intended victim being her step-sister, a young man found shot in a park in a drug related murder, a seventy one year old woman stabbed in her home in a suspected robbery and a fifteen year old boy shot for his new boots...

Much of this book was shocking to me. The brutal crimes, the gang related killings (including a horrific machete attack), drug related shootings and the sheer numbers of gun crimes are horrific. However, what shined through was how committed the detectives were in solving these crimes and how they managed to keep their humanity in the midst of all this violence. The death of children was obviously the most upsetting

to the detectives; but whether the victim was truly defenceless or had a long criminal history, the homicide squad did their utmost to solve the case and find some sort of justice for the victim and family. If you have any interest in true crime, or law enforcement, you will find this a saddening, often moving, read. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Lesa says

Sometimes narrative nonfiction can be as compelling as a good novel. Del Quentin Wilber's book, *A Good Month for Murder*, is an excellent example. The award-winning reporter spent months with the Prince George's County, Maryland, Homicide Squad, and then distilled his research into a book that covers February, 2013, one month that exemplifies the inside workings of a dedicated, dogged team of detectives.

Twenty-five detectives and five sergeants make up the PG Homicide Unit, a group expected to investigate crimes in the county east of the capital. It's a county of almost 900,000 residents, a diverse population that's spread over 485 square miles. And, the unit members work long shifts, sometimes 48 hours straight, to try to solve homicides. Wilber refers to it as "homicide, policing's most dynamic and intellectually challenging assignment."

It was Lieutenant Billy Rayle who supplied the title for the book. After a quiet December, 2012, he predicted January would get busier. "But February - watch out. Be ready for February. It will be a good month for murder." And, he was right. PG County's Homicide Squad had to deal with twelve killings in twenty-eight days, a daunting job. Why is Wilber's book so compelling? He introduces readers to the men and women of the Homicide Squad, their quirks and eccentricities, providing short sketches to show how they arrived in Homicide. He introduces murder victims, as seen through the eyes of the investigating detectives. He shows how cop humor sometimes gets them through the long hours and frustrations. And, he takes readers into the hours of legwork, paperwork, questioning of witnesses and suspects. Sometimes the detectives find the killers. Sometimes, the cases drag on for years, while the detectives are still determined to find answers.

Wilber's book left me wanting more. I wanted to know more than he gave us in the epilogue. Where are those detectives now? The author did mention some that had retired at the time he wrote the book. But, he makes us care about the members of that Homicide Squad. And, he makes us care about the men and women who give up family life, sleep, health, in order to solve homicides. *A Good Month for Murder* is the story of people who dedicated their lives and careers to putting killers in prison while finding answers for grieving family members.

Beth Withers says

As I was reading this book, I found myself quite confused because of all the different murders, all in varying states of being investigated. I thought that I might not be rating the book very highly until I realized that this confusion gave me a more realistic picture of what a homicide squad does than any perfectly organized book would do. I could almost feel the tension and frustration of the different squad members. Realistically, also, not every murder is solved. It isn't a television show, but real, messy life. I appreciate more what these dedicated people do now, the hours they put in and the sacrifices they make. I believe that the author, in the end, did an excellent job of portraying a month in a homicide squad.

Darcia Helle says

This is a compelling read for anyone interested in the life of a homicide cop and/or how homicide investigations are handled. This is not CSI or Law and Order, where homicides are solved quickly and suspects almost always confess at the end. The cases we read about here are real and messy, giving us a clear understanding of how difficult a homicide detective's job can be.

In a time when we're seeing lots of negative press coverage about cops, this book offers us insight into some of the more dedicated cops on the force. We see the toll the job takes on them, both emotionally and physically. We also see how difficult it can be for them to have any sort of personal life, when their work is almost always time-sensitive and murders don't stop occurring simply because they're busy.

The content here is brutally honest. The author doesn't try to make the cops look better or worse. He shows us things as they happen, the way they happen. At times this made me sympathize with the detectives, and at times it made me uncomfortable. For instance, some of the interrogations were brutal. While I knew this intellectually, reading an actual account brings the reality into sharp focus. I'm not talking about physical brutality, but emotional and psychological. It's easy to understand how and why people confess to crimes they did not commit, and that is a disturbing fact. But, at the same time, I also saw, perhaps for the first time, why the detectives sometimes push harder than they should. They are frustrated, angry, desperate to get a killer off the streets and provide answers to a grieving family.

Despite the dark content, the writing style makes this an easy read. The narrative is engaging, with no interference from the author. It's like we're right there as everything happens. We're provided with details along the way, such as little quirks a detective might have, which help bring the people involved to life.

This book does not go beyond the scope of the daily trials and tribulations of the Prince George's County homicide detectives. If you're looking for a book that explores social factors and digs deep into the sociological and psychological issues of crime, this is not that book. But if you're looking to better understand the truth of solving a homicide, this is definitely that book.

Shawn says

It was all a little too quick? A lot of detectives, a lot of murders, and not very many pages to develop everything. (To be honest, I really couldn't keep track of the investigators at all.) It is a nice, competent book, but not in the category of David Simon.

Nancy Ellis says

Just as good as the fictional homicide detective adventures!

Jacki York says

I enjoyed this read but I was puzzled by what felt like an abrupt ending.

Randal White says

An excellent telling of the trials the incredibly dedicated police detectives of the Prince George's County Sheriffs Department experienced during just one month of time, February of 2013, a time of multiple murders. Anyone who finds themselves second guessing the actions of all police based on the misdeeds of a few should give this book a read. The efforts and hard work of these men and women in solving very difficult cases is noteworthy. All the time exacting a personal toll on each of them, and their families. At first I was a bit put off by the frenetic pace and timing of the book, but came to understand that it was an accurate depiction of the events. In real life, the murders do not conveniently come spaced out one at a time, and able to be solved by the end of a one hour TV drama. This was a hard book to put down!

Kris says

This is a fabulous entry to the true crime genre. Rather than focusing on a specific crime, this book focuses on several teams of homicide detectives in Prince George County, Maryland. All of the cases are ones that occurred in the month of February 2013. For people who enjoy some of the shows on Discovery ID and A&E, like *The Detectives* and *The First 48*, then this book is for you.

The front of the book provides a map of the area that is covered by the homicide squads in question and maps where each individual was murdered and their name and age. Prince George County is located in Maryland very close to the Washington D.C. Line. The chapters initially introduce the date, time and which detectives are assigned to the case.

From there, the facts of the case unfold. In a very few instances, the case is already underway but there were developments in February 2013 that prompted a greater focus on a case that may have gone somewhat cold. There are a few details provided about the detectives private lives and how they became involved in having a career in law enforcement and how many years they have worked as an officer and in the homicide squad specifically.

The victim is then identified and the process of investigating the murder begins. From surveying the initial crime scene, witness interviews, forensic tech collections, notifying the family of the victim all the way through tracking down suspects, narrowing the field and then honing in on the actual perpetrator.

An easily solved murder is called a "smoker". A high profile case is called a "redball express." High profile cases are those defined by being particularly heinous in nature or involving a vulnerable member of the public – the elderly, the very young, perhaps having fame or notoriety on the part of the victim or the murderer or any case that the media chooses to focus on in a sensational manner.

There are certain things that become noticeable right away about the homicide unit. One is that it is populated by very eccentric and quirky personalities. Another is the dearth of women in the unit. There are only two or three female detectives and they get very little focus in the book. The

humor expressed by the detectives is very much in the gallows humor vein and is used as a coping mechanism by those who spend long hours immersed in the unpleasant business of murder. An interesting thing the author did was not to pull punches – if a detective was annoying, obnoxious or narcissistic, that was shown rather than painting a picture of these cops as being overly heroic or idealizing them.

Included in the stories as well, were a cop shooting which is investigated by the homicide detectives as murder; a case where they were called in to investigate deaths that occurred during the course of a house fire and a stabbing that walks a very fine line between involuntary manslaughter and self-defense. In other words, there are times when murder is not murder and vice versa. As for solving every case within the first forty eight hours....well, unless it is a smoker, not so much.

I would recommend this book whole heartedly and give it a very strong four stars. There is one thing that I would like to draw attention to, more for the sake of the editorial and publishing staff and on behalf of readers. This does not occur too often in the book but it occurs enough to be noticeable to me as a reader and therefore it will be noticeable to other readers.

There is an over-reliance on machinery to pick up spelling and grammatical errors. For the most part, it works. What doesn't work however is when a word is spelled correctly but it is the incorrect word – for example, past for passed. Computer aided editing cannot discern context either. People need to be brought back into the copy reading and editing realm. As books become more and more expensive, it becomes harder for readers to accept the dip in quality control of the printed word.

The correct use and context is extremely important to readers. While we have progressed as a society in our use of machines in an effort to save money in business, it is important to remember that readers are why books are written. If the errors become noticeable to readers, they begin to impact the reading experience and it becomes detrimental to sales of books and it may deter readers from picking up books by that author or publishing house in the future.

A small thing but the one thing that affected my overall enjoyment of what is otherwise a very strong book and a great read. This one is a keeper!
