



The Whiskey Baron

Jon Sealy

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Late one night at the end of a scorching summer, a phone call rouses Sheriff Furman Chambers out of bed. Two men have been shot dead on Highway 9 in front of the Hillside Inn, a one-time boardinghouse that is now just a front for Larthan Tull's liquor business. When Sheriff Chambers arrives to investigate, witnesses say a man named Mary Jane Hopewell walked into the tavern, dragged two of Tull's runners into the street, and laid them out with a shotgun. Sheriff Chambers's investigation leads him into the Bell village, where Mary Jane's family lives a quiet, hardscrabble life of working in the cotton mill. While the weary sheriff digs into the mystery and confronts the county's underground liquor operation, the whiskey baron himself is looking for vengeance. Mary Jane has gotten in the way of his business, and you don't do that to Larthan Tull and get away with it.

Hailed as a "grand new talent" (Bret Lott) and a "significant new voice in Southern fiction" (Ron Rash), Jon Sealy has written a haunting debut novel. With its unforgettable characters and evocative setting, *The Whiskey Baron* is a gripping drama about family ties and bad choices, about the folly of power and the limitations of the law.

The Whiskey Baron Details

Date : Published May 1st 2014 by Hub City Press (first published March 19th 2014)

ISBN : 9781891885747

Author : Jon Sealy

Format : Hardcover 250 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Mystery, Novels, Detective

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From Reader Review The Whiskey Baron for online ebook

Rhonda Browning White says

Two young whiskey-runners lay dead in front of the Hillside Inn, and while all fingers point to a drunken man nicknamed "Mary Jane" Hopewell, Sheriff Furman Chambers wonders if wealthy whiskey baron Larthan Tull might be the one to blame.

Family ties will be tested, relationships will be strained, and love will leave broken hearts in the journey that is this story.

Recommended for lovers of Southern and Appalachian literature, and for those who simply love a spellbinding story.

JoAnne Pulcino says

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This remarkable debut novel introduces a fresh and extremely talented new author of Southern fiction.

THE WHISKEY BARON takes place in South Carolina in 1932 that is a mystery and a literary triumph.

Larthan Tull the whiskey baron of the title discovers his business is being threatened by two of his runners and their partner, Mary Jane Hopewell. The two runners are murdered outside the Hillside Inn which is the front for Tull's liquor business. Witnesses say Mary Jane Hopewell is the guilty party even though he ran off leaving a trail of blood. Sheriff Furman Chambers who is eager to retire but realizes he must take on this final case as it involves his friends and neighbors and their families. His investigation takes him to the community of people living a hardscrabble life of working in the cotton mills, to the underground liquor operations and stills and the despicable Tull's attitude that places him and his business above the law.

This is a novel that actually hums with plot and exceptional characters that are so true to life they just ring. The sense of time and place becomes a large part of the plot and gives you a sense of being there. Mr. Sealy is joining an illustrious group of wonderful young authors who are giving readers a brand new look at Southern fiction. Recently I have been thrilled by Wiley Cash and Ron Rash and have been captivated by this new trend.

This book comes highly recommended for exquisite writing, intriguing plot, fantastic characters and the acknowledgement that we are welcoming a superb craftsman into our reading lives.

Roger says

OK, for a first novel, it wasn't too bad. Some of the criticisms I've read about this book—too slow, too predictable, too religious--were also true, but when I realized that some SC book organization had published this book because of its sense of place, it became clear. Because this book certainly has a sense of place. The evocation of upstate SC is very real, and this from someone who has only ridden through it on interstates. But as for the book, the author really needs to learn pacing. Long stretches where nothing happens and suddenly some very violent incidents. I would have liked this book much more if there were less violence and more of the children speaking. The adults were simply too evil.

Mom2nine says

This book is receiving one of my few five star ratings, for two reasons: I didn't want to put this book down, but I didn't want it to finish, either. Sealy has a way with words, his characterization was spot on, bringing out a humanness in what should be unlikeable people. I have spent 35 yrs. off and on in the area where his book is based and have a love/hate relationship with it. Sealy has an obvious understanding of the area and her people. Story does not have a real mystery aspect, in that the reader is fairly certain who committed the murders in the opening chapter. If anything this is a testament to his writing capabilities, though, as the story remains suspenseful. I think it would make a good movie. I received this book from goodreads contest; may I say I love this site and this is one first time author that I will be watching to see if he has any more stories to write. Book was published by Hub City Press. Their story is worth looking at, esp. for those of us who read way too many books and need authors/publishers to supply our need.

Clare says

This was an okay first novel, but lacked the brightness of a "Land More Kind Than Home." The story is about bootlegging in SC during Prohibition. It takes place in a down-on-its-heels mill town with all the predictable issues with a bad guy (the whiskey baron) and the the good guys, the sheriff being the only one I cared about. I guess the predictability of the story is what put me off, and descriptions that just didn't capture what he was aiming for. I found myself skimming in the end just to finish it.

Maggie Reed says

I really liked this book. Ron Rash was right. And the thing about it is, every character in this book reminded me of someone I knew from those particular days, especially the way I identified my Uncle Hap with Larthan Tull. Not that anyone cares, but I'll expound on this one more in a blog.

Chuck McGrady says

I read this book, in part, because of the recommendation from another author I like, Wiley Cash, author of A Land More Kind Than Home. I liked his book, and I thought I might like this one. It was a good decision.

Jon Sealy is really good at developing his characters. It is hard to sometimes like characters who are not good people, but found myself liking Mary Jane Hopewell despite his flaws [Yes. "Mary Jane" is a male.] I'll definitely read another novel by Sealy.

Larry says

The nation is in the throes of the Great Depression and the 18th Amendment has outlawed alcohol, much to the dismay of many. In the remote "Bell village" in South Carolina, however, life is a little bit better than some other parts of the country -- the cotton mills are humming and the illegal moonshine business is thriving. That's not say that people aren't struggling to get by, but a man can still get a drink and sometimes even wrangle a job in one of the mills. When two young "hellraisers" are savagely gunned down right in front of Larthan Tull's illegal saloon, the aging and weary sheriff, Furman Chambers, is called in to investigate. The sheriff is willing to look the other way if a man wants a drink now and then, but murder is another story. The bartender is pointing the finger at a buddy of the dead men, another hellraiser known as Mary Jane Hopewell. Mary Jane is a fella, you see, but his mama attired him in "Mary Jane" dresses when he was a youngun and the nickname just stuck. It's obvious from the very beginning that Mary Jane isn't the killer, but now he's on the run and Sheriff Chambers has his plate full with solving the crime and getting life back to normal in the Bell village. This isn't a conventional mystery, if that's what you're looking for, but instead a parable about choices in life. We oftentimes have to make decisions and those decisions, for better or for worse, impact our lives as well as the lives of others.

Michael says

This review originally ran in the 12/1/13 issue of *Library Journal*.

Prohibition-era South Carolina is the setting of Sealy's debut, an assured work of literary suspense. In the mill town of Castle, work is beginning to dry up, but Larthan Tull keeps the alcohol in steady supply, running the bootleg whiskey trade with an iron fist. Nobody questions the arrangement—even weary Sheriff Furman Chambers, eager for a clean retirement, looks the other way—until two of Tull's men are killed in what appears to be a power grab by Mary Jane Hopewell, an outcast with designs of cutting into Tull's business. But the townsfolk—and Sheriff Chambers—aren't so sure: Mary Jane has always walked the line but never crossed over to violence. Tull seeks mortal revenge while Mary Jane goes on the lam but with one complication: his nephew has fallen in love with the whiskey baron's daughter. VERDICT "Violence is taking over everything," one character laments, and that feeling of a more simple and moral time being lost to the vagaries of man and industry pervades the whole novel. Though the book's climax is light on surprises, Sealy's finely drawn characters and evocative sense of place and time make this a memorable read, on par with the best of Daniel Woodrell and Ron Rash.

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Katrina says

I picked up this book on a recent trip to South Carolina. Overall: a solid read for anyone with an interest in

rural prohibition-era life during the Great Depression. I really enjoyed reading about that world through the eyes of many characters. The descriptions of the wild southern outdoors are particularly beautiful. There is a chapter of Mary Jane on a terrible bender, stumbling through Charlotte; I enjoyed the contrast between the rural community and big city, although both were struggling with the same rampant poverty and addiction.

The first half of the novel was very intriguing and exciting. As the book continued, I found it repetitive with heavy-handed foreshadowing of what was to come. The religious overtones were a bit much for my liking.

3/5

Allie says

Okay, so I was reading this book for an English 101 class I'm taking so technically i don't think i was suppose to like it. Well, I did like it. This book was unlike other things I generally reed 1 because it is a historical fiction (which I will be reading more of now) and 2 because it was very much written in third person but also went very deep into all the characters thoughts. I really enjoyed reading a book written like that. :)

So what I thought of it? Well I am not usually one to try and correct an author with how they have written their book and I am not going to do that today. If I like a book. I like a book.

Just how it is, and I am not going to try to suggest how I think it should have been written.

So I liked this book. The ending was very big and dramatic and that's exactly what I like. It all led up to something and it led up to something big. Such a good ending even if I didn't like everything that happened. It was still a good ending, weird...?

That is all I have to say.

Lissa Notreallywolf says

This is a novel and to some extent a mystery, written with a curious detachment, as if we are seeming the events through a scrim of sunlit dust motes. And that is an image we get from the cotton mill in the small town of Castle, where a bootlegger is tolerated as part of the relief of the Depression era mill town. We learn how the factory workers came from independent homesteads, their farms claimed by the banks as it became impossible for them to retain their holdings. Tull is also one of these displaced characters using family secrets to establish himself as a supplier for the Madame of bootlegging in Charlotte, Aunt Lou. She's the evil counterpart of the widow back in Castle, who has been keeping company with an alcoholic dubbed Mary Jane. They are both stoic, but Abigail Coleman makes whiskey and Aunt Lou distributes it. Coleman is led astray by her fancy man's desire to retail her homemade product in competition with Tull. The plot gets further complicated by a relationship between Mary Jane's nephew and the Baron's daughter, Evelyn. His other nephew, Willie is often the perspective the events transpire through, his twelve-year view very similar in some ways to the beleaguered Sheriff Chambers. None of this really spoils the plot which in retrospect reads a little like a tragic mountain ballad.

Brian Welsch says

I liked the book and general atmosphere. The writing had a matter-of-fact quality that fits the slow, southern heat of summer. While, it was written well, there were some scenes thrown in that I didn't think added much to the story. Also, for a tale that masquerades as a detective story, there wasn't much detecting going on. Still a worthwhile read.

Kaitlin says

Sealy paints the landscape of Carolina Piedmont during Prohibition in harsh truthful dramatic light with a spine-tingling ending you will not see coming.

Karen says

It's not a bad book, but I can't shake the impression that the author wrote whole paragraphs and sat back and thought to himself, "yes, that's literary...people will quote that."

It's good, but the writing is self-aware in a bad way.
