Heavens Prisoners: A Novel (Dave Robicheaux Mysteries) by James Lee Burke

A Dark Book For A Dark Period In New Orleans...

Dave Robicheaux is trying to put a life of violence and crime behind him, leaving homicide to run a boat-rental business in Louisianas bayou country, but when a two-engine crashes in the Gulf, he is drawn into a chilling and terrifying investigation.

My Personal Review:
Heavens Prisoners by James Lee Burke is the second book in his Dave Robicheaux mystery series. While Burkes series has grown to be one of the best ever, in Heavens Prisoners, hes still in the growing stage.

Since book one, Neon Rain, Robicheaux has quit the New Orleans Police Department, cashed in his pension and bought a boat-and-bait business on a bayou in New Iberia. He has also married Annie Ballard. They have tried to settle into a quiet life, but its just not in Robicheauxs nature. Robicheaux and Annie are boating on the Gulf when they see a plane go down. Robicheaux straps on his scuba tank, and is able to rescue a small girl (the four adults are already dead). The girl is a Salvadoran refugee and Robicheaux and Annie name her Alafair and decide to raise her as their own. But when federal authorities report that only three bodies were onboard the plane, Robicheaux starts investigating the identity of the mystery man and the reason for the cover-up. He is first visited by the DEA and Immigration. Then he is threatened by mob enforcers and told to mind his own business. It soon becomes obvious that the Iberian Sheriffs Department is clueless (the sheriff runs a dry cleaning business with greater efficiency), so Robicheaux reluctantly joins the sheriffs department as a deputy.

Heavens Prisoners follows the same formula of most Burke books. Robicheaux stumbles onto something illegal or suspicious. When he starts investigating, he gets threatened and warned off by some bad guys
mobsters, feds, crooked cops and/or unscrupulous businessmen). Robicheaux cant just leave things alone, and the situation quickly escalates. Hes not the bumbling Inspector Columbo, armed with only a wrinkled trench coat. Instead, he bursts on the scene with a loaded and cocked .45. And then something catastrophic occurs.

This book is Burkes darkest book yet, and Robicheaux deals with his alcoholism, Viet Nam flashbacks and death. While he claims to loathe the political hypocrisy and the addictive, brutal ugliness of metropolitan law enforcement, Robicheaux finally admits that he actually loved the adrenaline rush of danger and his feelings of power over an evil world. Unfortunately, this comes at the expense of his family.

What made reading this book especially sobering was reading it immediately after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina to New Orleans and southern Louisiana. Burke has a true love affair with NOLA and the bayou, and I hope that this area can be brought back to its former beauty (rural areas, towns and cities alike). Burke quotes an eerily prophetic set of lyrics from a John Fogerty song that read: Dont come `round tonight/Its bound to take your life/A bad moons on the rise/I hear hurricanes a blowing/I know the end is coming soon/I feel the river overflowing/I can hear the voice of rage and ruin.

I enjoyed Heavens Prisoners and it definitely filled in more gaps about Robicheauxs background. Also, Burke continues to be a master of down-home witticisms. One of my favorites is Im floating around on an ice cube thats melting in a toilet. I have two more books on deck, but then I think Im going to take a little break. I need to start reading something a little less dark for a spell.

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