Terminal: A Burke Novel

Jeffrey Barlow
Pacific University

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.pacificu.edu/inter09

Recommended Citation
Terminal: A Burke Novel

Description
Review of Terminal: A Burke Novel

Rights
Terms of use for work posted in CommonKnowledge.

This book/site review is available at CommonKnowledge: http://commons.pacificu.edu/inter09/22
Terminal: A Burke Novel

Posted on April 1, 2009 by Editor

Review by Jeffrey Barlow, Editor, Interface.

A reader will sometimes encounter a book—perhaps many books—which he or she does not like. It is rare, however, to encounter a book that actively dislikes the reader. Terminal is just such a book.

But for those interested in the many portrayals of the impact of the Internet found in fiction, Terminal, and several of Andrew Vachss' other works, are instructive. They are also highly educational, in the sense in which watching an auto wreck or viewing an autopsy is also no doubt educational. But to find them entertaining requires entering a dark world of suffering and despair, with no expectation of leaving refreshed. Though in a very literal sense, the reader might find him or herself recreated.

Andrew Vachss is, if judged solely by the number of his published works, a highly successful author—so successful that he now makes some of his works available free as downloadable files on the Internet [1]. He is also a noted attorney who once edited The New England Law Review and has been a part of several landmark cases [2]. In addition, he is a passionate defender of children’s rights and a practicing counselor who has worked in a wide variety of correctional institutions and programs [3]. As impressive as these achievements are, they do not begin to indicate the full range of his accomplishments or his complexity.

The world he has consistently created in his fiction, featuring his anti-hero Burke and the criminalized anti-heroes whose lives revolve around him, is more than dark. It is thoroughly depressing; each character is inevitably stamped with some dreadful human shortcoming, ranging from spectacular physical handicaps, an inability to live within the confines of his or her original gender, compulsive criminality, outright insanity or a love for murder and mayhem, which is briefly, occasionally, and quite incidentally bent toward committing good. These individuals live, one and all, off the grid, outside society. They live as an extended family, to Burke the most precious of human social organizations. The enemies of family are often described as “freaks.” Of this antagonism Burke says: “To me the freaks are a Tribe. Anytime I take one from them, that’s one for us.” [4]
In this hell of omnipresent and threatening violence, only the young are truly innocent. Burke is, of course, more than disinterested in earning anything resembling an honest living—to Burke, and perhaps to Vachss, the honest and socially successful are at best complicit in the continuing crimes perpetrated against the weak and disadvantaged. Burke’s career consists of preying on those who prey on others, particularly racists, child-abusers, pimps and pushers, or other exploiters of the weak.

The tool of choice for such exploiters is the Internet. It began to feature in Vachss’ earlier works as the sewer through which child pornography and other forms of malevolence and evil routinely slither.

Those who use the Internet as an evil tool must, of course, be fought by those who use it, however incidentally, for good. In Terminal, for example, we meet the “nephew” who was abused by his parents to the point where he has lost all emotion—he does however, love animals and plans to protect them by eliminating humans [5]. He is also designing a game based on the World of Warcraft, which is succinctly explained, in which the goal of each player—all of whom hate each other—is to destroy the game world itself, taking down the virtual wealth and identities carefully built up over years of play. The winner gets the pleasure of this ultimate act of virtual annihilation.

The nephew gives Burke access to one of his casual projects, a memory stick/flash drive which, when placed in a USB port, instantly and totally recodes every system in the computer to which it is connected. When asked why he built this infernal machine, this geek from hell replies: “To hurt things…as if that was the only sensible answer to any question.” [6]

Terminal is not, it must be apparent, an easy read. At many points the narrator, Burke, steps aside and addresses the reader:

You know why we hate you? Not because you don’t know what we know, but because, even if you did, you wouldn’t give a damn.
So I’m sitting here, waiting to commit extortion, and planning a lot worse. I’m what you’d call a career criminal. That’s why I’ll never be you. And I’m proud of it [7].

Burke, like Vachss we must assume, is totally uninterested in questions we examine at Interface, such as which aspects of the Internet are positive ones and which negative, and how we can then improve upon the negative so as to realize its full promise. The author’s rage at the exploitation of children in particular is such that no possible good can outweigh the Internet’s calamitous consequences [8]. To Burke, if not to Vachss—who after all has his own web pages—the Internet is a tool of fallen humanity, and like us, will only do evil in any foreseeable future.

Endnotes

[2] See, for example, the material on the Robert Lewis case at:
http://www.vachss.com/downloads.html


[8] For the range of Vachss’ opinions on this issue, see interview excerpts at:
http://www.vachss.com/av_interviews.html

This entry was posted in Uncategorized by Editor. Bookmark the permalink [http://bcis.pacificu.edu/interface/?p=3590].

16 THOUGHTS ON “TERMINAL: A BURKE NOVEL”

best miter saw
on February 2, 2014 at 12:35 AM said:

Your style is unique compared to other people
I have read stuff from. Many thanks for posting when you have the opportunity, Guess I
will just bookmark this page.

infrared grill reviews
on February 3, 2014 at 6:45 PM said:

Wow, that’s what I was looking for, what a stuff!
existing here at this website, thanks admin of this web page.

best humidifier
on February 3, 2014 at 9:17 PM said:
Hey there would you mind letting me know which web host you’re using? I’ve loaded your blog in 3 completely different browsers and I must say this blog loads a lot quicker then most. Can you suggest a good hosting provider at a reasonable price? Thanks, I appreciate it!

best pressure washer  
on February 3, 2014 at 9:32 PM said:

I was wondering if you ever considered changing the page layout of your blog? Its very well written; I love what you’ve got to say. But maybe you could a little more in the way of content so people could connect with it better.

You’ve got an awful lot of text for only having 1 or 2 pictures. Maybe you could space it out better?

best vacuum for hardwood floors  
on February 3, 2014 at 10:05 PM said:

I loved as much as you’ll receive carried out right here. The sketch is attractive, your authored subject matter stylish. nonetheless, you command get got an shakiness over that you wish be delivering the following. unwell unquestionably come further formerly again since exactly the same nearly very often inside case you shield this increase.

best home gym  
on February 3, 2014 at 10:11 PM said:

Appreciating the dedication you put into your site and detailed information you offer. It’s awesome to come across a blog every once in a while that isn’t the same outdated rehashed material. Excellent read! I’ve bookmarked your site and I’m including your RSS feeds to my Google account.
**best jig saw**
on **February 4, 2014 at 12:46 AM** said:

Wow, wonderful blog layout! How long have you been blogging for?

you made blogging look easy. The overall look of your website is great, let alone the content!

---

**scroll saw reviews**
on **February 4, 2014 at 1:16 AM** said:

Attractive component to content. I simply stumbled upon your website and in accession capital to say that I acquire in fact loved account your weblog posts. Any way I will be subscribing to your augment and even I success you get admission to consistently quickly.

---

**garbage disposal reviews**
on **February 4, 2014 at 1:38 AM** said:

I got this web site from my buddy who told me regarding this site and now this time I am browsing this web page and reading very informative content here.

---

**rifle scope reviews**
on **February 4, 2014 at 4:54 AM** said:

Hi everyone, it’s my first pay a visit at this web site, and article is in fact fruitful in support of me, keep up posting these types of articles.
best electric tea kettle

on February 4, 2014 at 5:27 AM said:

It’s genuinely very difficult in this full of activity life to listen news on TV, therefore I only use world wide web for that reason, and obtain the most recent news.

africa

on February 4, 2014 at 10:16 AM said:

Attractive section of content. I just stumbled upon your weblog and in accession capital to assert that I purchase in fact enjoyed account your blog posts. Any way I’ll be subscribing for ones augment and even I achievement you entry consistently quickly.

nigeria entertainment news

on February 4, 2014 at 10:27 AM said:

Sorry for ones immense assessment, but I’m incredibly loving the article, and hope this, and also the beneficial review some other persons have written, will help you determine if it’s the right option for you.

nigeria entertainment news

on February 4, 2014 at 10:36 AM said:

This really answered my drawback, thank you!

clothes steamer reviews

on February 4, 2014 at 4:14 PM said:

Hi, Neat post. There’s a problem along with your site in web explorer,
might check this? IE nonetheless is the market leader and a good part of other folks will pass over your wonderful writing because of this problem.

**tilson**

on February 4, 2014 at 8:53 PM said:

Keep functioning, terrific job!