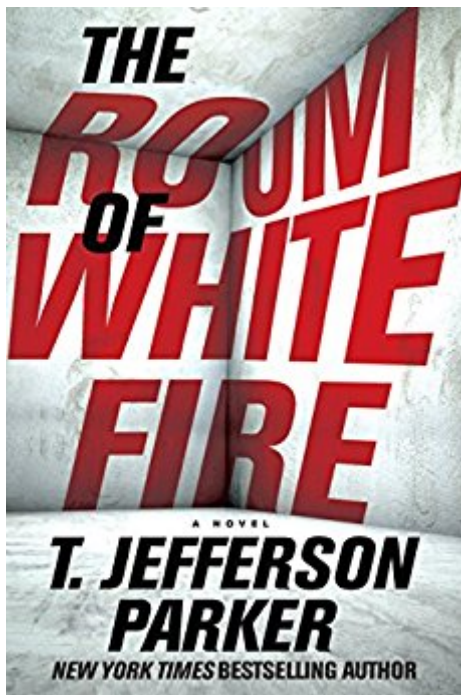


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The Room Of White Fire



Synopsis

For fans of Michael Connelly and C. J. Box: a stirring thriller from New York Times bestseller and award winner T. Jefferson Parker. In *The Room of White Fire*, a P.I. must hunt down a soldier who is damaged by war, dangerous, and on the run. A young soldier escaped from a mental institution. A P.I. carrying his own wounds hired to track that soldier down. A race against the clock to bring the soldier home before he reveals the secret that haunts him. Roland Ford—once a cop, then a marine, now a private investigator—is good at finding people. But when he’s asked to locate Air Force veteran Clay Hickman, he realizes he’s been drawn into something deep and dark. He knows war, having served as a Marine in first Fallujah; he also knows personal pain, as only two years have passed since his wife, Justine, died. What he doesn’t know is why a shroud of secrecy hangs over the disappearance of Clay Hickman—and why he’s getting a different story from everyone involved. To begin with, there’s Sequoia, the teenage woman who helped Clay escape; she’s smart enough to fend off Ford’s questions but impetuous enough to be on the run with an armed man. Then there’s Paige Hulet, Clay’s doctor, who clearly cares deeply for his welfare but is impossible to read, even as she inspires in Ford the first desire he has felt since his wife’s death. And there’s Briggs Spencer, the proprietor of the mental institution who is as enigmatic as he is brash, and ambitious to the point of being ruthless. What could Clay possibly know to make this search so desperate? What began as just a job becomes a life-or-death obsession for Ford, pitting him against immensely powerful and treacherous people and forcing him to contend with chilling questions about truth, justice, and the American way.

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Customer Reviews

T. Jefferson Parker has been experimenting with mainstream fiction, magic realism and other potential distractions. In *THE ROOM OF WHITE FIRE* he returns, pedal-to-the-metal, with a beautiful piece of crime fiction. The protagonist is Roland Ford, an ex-cop, ex-marine, current PI from Falbrook, CA. Roland is hired to find a young man named Clay Hickman, an escaped patient from a mental institution. The facility is owned by a rich psychologist whose enhanced interrogation techniques were adopted by the CIA. This individual, Briggs Spencer, employs some nasty security personnel and jousts with Clay Hickman. He has a doctor, Paige Hulet. Both Paige and Briggs tell Roland to call them first if and when he finds Clay. When he is told the same thing by a CIA operative, it becomes clear that Roland has entered a web of evil and deceit from which he might never emerge. Roland's nascent romantic relationship with Paige (Roland has recently lost his wife and still carries the wounds) constitutes the personal subplot. Readers of the book's reviews will learn quickly what the book is about, but let me alert readers to possible SPOILERS before I go further. I will not reveal any of the plot details. As I always tell my students, there are two things which are pivotal to a crime story:

What it is about and what it is really about (= subject, theme). *THE ROOM OF WHITE FIRE* is about black sites for enhanced interrogation and the techniques developed by non-military, non-CIA psychologists. In this case, the site is in Romania. What it is really about is the traversing of the line that separates good from evil; Parker's brief but explicit references to Conrad's *HEART OF DARKNESS* say it all. As Roland comes to see, there are actions so horrific that they lead some to lose their souls but save their minds, while others lose their minds in order to save their souls. The reader should be warned that there are two extended scenes detailing the nature of specific forms of torture. These are very explicit and will be too strong for some readers. The bottom line is that this is a superb novel with fascinating characters, a strong sense of setting, a piledriver

plot (with a crescendo ending complete with aftershocks) and heavy thematic freight which, at some points, rises to the level of prose poetry. TJP is back and we can only hope that we will see Roland Ford again, and soon. Some have felt that TJP had temporarily lost his voice; if that is true he has found it once again, along with the crime fiction chops on which he built his career and reputation. Highly recommended.

I must preface this review with the facts that Jeff is a friend and I greatly admire his work. But, if you want to know why T. Jefferson Parker has won three Edgar Awards, read this book. It just might garner him a fourth. It's that good. In *THE ROOM OF WHITE FIRE*, we meet Roland Ford, ex-marine with his own post-war damage and now a PI. He is hired to find Clay Hickman, a severely damaged veteran of Mid-East war and now an escapee from a high-dollar, exclusive mental health facility in Northern San Diego County. But this is no simple task. Clay doesn't want to be found—at least not until he can tell his story of black-site interrogations that threaten many high-level officials who will do anything to keep the story buried. This tale is fast-paced and will grab you from page one. The cast of characters are compelling and the writing is, as always, spot on. Do not miss this wonderful novel. DP Lyle, award-winning author, lecturer, story consultant

It's hard to find the words when you are trying to describe a brilliant work by such a talented writer. I've been a fan of Parker's ever since I first read *Laguna Heat* nearly thirty years ago. *The Room of White Fire* is among Parker's best. It's up there with *Silent Joe*, *California Girl*, *The Fallen*. He has created another flawed and damaged hero. But that shouldn't be news to anyone who is familiar with his work. He is a master at that. He pulls characters out of the ether with such style and panache, and makes it look easy. Even the secondary characters leap off the page with all three dimensions fully drawn. This is how you write crime fiction. Or any fiction. Take notes.

I thought I'd read virtually all of Parker's riveting crime thrillers but when I checked on Wikipedia, I found I was wrong. I've read a number of them but this is his twenty-third novel, all crime fiction. He's written a number of stand-alones but I hope this is the first in a new series of procedurals because it's an awfully good one and he's an awfully good writer. Parker has always been good at capturing the dark undertones of West Coast violence and this novel is no exception. Ex-vet, ex-cop (he didn't last at that job long; he refused to cover for his

partner's over-hasty shooting of an innocent), now PI Roland Ford is hired to find a patient who has gone AWOL from the mental institution where he's been incarcerated for quite a while. The missing man is Clay Hickman, an Air Force veteran. Ford quickly realizes that something else is going on behind the scenes. He's being paid above his usual rate and three people – the patient's physician, the institution's director and the very wealthy psychologist who founded and still owns the institution – all insist that when Ford finds Clay, he return him directly to the person asking him and not just to the hospital. Clay keeps popping up just beyond reach and he's talking about bringing White Fire down on the people who put him away. It turns out that he worked for the rich man and the hospital director when he was in the service: they operated a clandestine interrogation operation where something, it's not clear what, terrible happened. Whatever, it snapped a link in Clay's head and ever since he's been dogged by guilt and dark memories. Eventually, Ford has to take a side to help unravel a dark conspiracy that has connections all the way to the highest levels of government. A lot of scary stuff happens en passage in this very good action fiction which is another winner for one of our very best crime fiction writers.

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