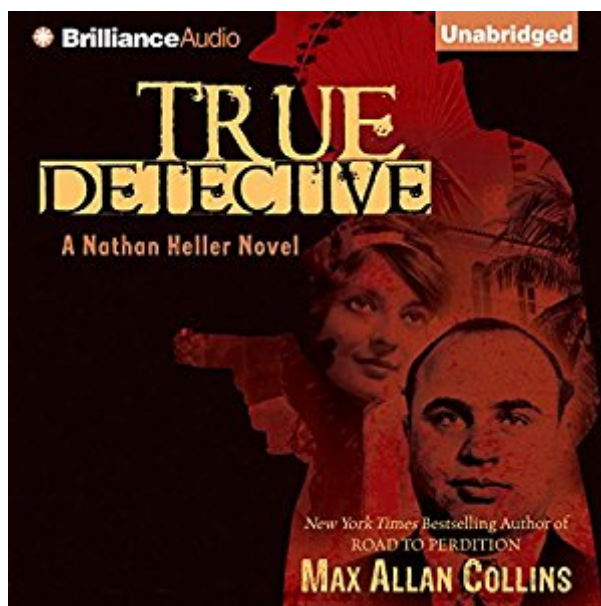


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True Detective: Nathan Heller Series, Book 1



Synopsis

In the mob-choked Chicago of 1932, private detective Nathan Heller may be willing to risk his life to earn a Depression dollar, but he never sacrifices his sardonic wit. Now, author Max Allan Collins (Road to Perdition) reissues the contemporary classic that introduces the wise-cracking Nathan Heller in all his guts and glory. When Mayor Cermak's "Hoodlum Squad" brings Heller along on a raid with no instructions but to keep his mouth shut and his gun handy, he becomes an unwitting, unwilling part of a hit on Al Capone's successor, Frank Nitti. As a result, Heller quits the force to become a private eye. His first job: head off a nation-shaking political assassination in Miami Beach. With the Chicago World's Fair as a backdrop, Heller encounters a ragtag array of crooks and clients, including Al Capone, George Raft, "Dutch" Reagan, and FDR himself. Rich in riveting plot turns, including a heartbreaking romance, True Detective is one of the most highly entertaining and unlikely coming-of-age stories ever written. That's why mystery fans and critics alike rank this historical thriller at the top of their lists - and why the book swept up a Shamus Award for the best novel from the Private Eye Writers of America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a solid read, and a promising start to a detective series that I'll probably try more of in the future. It's a hardboiled mystery, but generally avoids feeling too much like a cliché by using characters with a little more complexity than your typical crime fiction. The meticulous attention to historical detail adds a level of realism to the book. If it errs anywhere, it may be in cramming in so

many historical references. By the last third of the novel, some of the celebrity cameos start to feel forced, in spite of the fact that, yes, they could have been around in that region at that time. A couple times I felt as if chapters existed mainly to spotlight the tremendous amount of research that must have gone into this book, but for the most part, the narrative still moves along quickly. If you like classic detective fiction, you should enjoy it.

True Detective is the first novel in the Nathan Heller series from Max Allan Collins, written in first person giving it a real noir feel and with many historical details adding to the realism of the story. It sets the stage for further Heller novels, describing how Heller chooses to leave the Chicago police force and strike out on his own as a private investigator, and takes the reader through several cases Heller takes on as his new career begins. True Detective won the 1984 Shamus Award for Best P.I. Hardcover from the Private Eye Writers of America. Collins has followed this novel with 14 (soon to be 15) further novels and several short story collections featuring Heller. I found this to be a very enjoyable read. Heller is a personality who has enough flaws to be believable but remain sympathetic. He's left the police force because of his unwillingness to be a party to the corruption that exists there, but he doesn't mind a certain amount of involvement with criminals himself as he finds his way as a PI. The relationship he has with Eliot Ness is interesting, and Collins also sprinkles other real-life characters throughout the story, including an appearance by a young Ronald Reagan, who is working as a radio sports announcer, during Heller's visit to his girlfriends hometown, Franklin Roosevelt, Al Capone, and others. Collins does not incorporate excessive violence (there is actually very little), profanity (some, probably appropriate to the era which was seemingly more polite than our society today), or sex (a small amount but tastefully handled) into his story. The plot is propelled by the strength of the personality of the characters and the drama of the story line. Black and white photos are sprinkled throughout the novel - they don't come through with very much detail or clarity on an e-ink Kindle (I do my reading on a Voyage or PaperWhite model) and are better when viewed on an iPad or Kindle Fire, but as the photos are real period black and white relics the poor quality actually adds to the period feel of the book, which is probably intentional. It's a very satisfying read, and I plan to explore the further Heller novels as a result. For those interested, here are the Nathan Heller novels in the order of their appearance (links are to the kindle versions available here on - see comment to this review for the links not shown below since limits reviews to 10 links maximum): Novels: 1. True Detective (November 1983) 2. True Crime (December 1984) 3. The Million-Dollar Wound (February 1986) 4. Neon Mirage (February 1988) 5. Stolen Away (May 1991) 6. Carnal Hours (April

1994)7. *Blood and Thunder* (August 1995) (about Huey Long's assassination)8. *Damned in Paradise* (October 1996)9. *Flying Blind* (August 1998)10. *Majic Man* (September, 1999)11. *Angel in Black* (March 2001)12. *Chicago Confidential* (June 2002)13. *Bye Bye, Baby* (August 2011)14. *Target Lancer* (November 2012)15. *Ask Not* (October 2013)16. *Better Dead* (not yet published, but Collins has mentioned on his website that it is now complete and so I assume it will be released later in 2015)(A couple of the novels listed above are incorrectly numbered here on . I am 100% sure this listing is correct as I referred to both the wiki article on Collins as well as his own website to check the information and order of publication before finalizing here)Short Stories and novellas:- *Dying in the Post-War World* (October 1991) - Novella and short story collection (not available in Kindle edition. The novella *Dying in the Post-War World* appears in the later collection *Triple Play*, and the other short stories are included in the later collection "*Chicago Lightning*")- *Kisses of Death: A Nathan Heller Casebook* (June 2001) - Short story collection- *Chicago Lightning: The Collected Nathan Heller Short Stories* (October 2011)- *Triple Play: A Nathan Heller Casebook* (April 2012) - Includes "*Dying in the Post-War World*", "*Kisses of Death*", and "*Strike Zone*"For the fan wanting to have all of the Heller stories, they can all now be obtained for the Kindle. In addition to the novels, simply obtain the *Chicago Lightning* and *Triple Play* collections, and you've got it all.

Our story opens in December 1932, and our hero is Nate Heller. He's a Chicago cop, and as Chicago cops go, he's an honest one. "Which means anywhere else, I'd be in for twenty years," Heller says at one point. It's true: he takes the occasional bribe, and rumour has it he sleeps around. One day, while Heller is off-duty, he's picked up by Harry Lang and Harry Miller, two brutish cops who act like Mayor Anton Cermak's unofficial Brute Squad. They take him along for a police raid on an operation run by Frank Nitti, Al Capone's successor. Only it turns out to be an assassination attempt, as Lang shoots Nitti in the back. Things get a bit out of hand, and in the ensuing melee, Heller guns down one of the gangsters. The dead man was a nobody, an orphan from the old country. But the death bothers Heller. He was brought into the raid unawares, and he resents it. He helped cover something up in the past, and so now cops like Lang and Miller think he'll help them clean up any dirty work. Heller isn't perfect, but he has some standards. He's the best of a rotten bunch, if you will. So the long and short of it is, he quits the force and decides to go into business for himself as a private eye. And thus begins the complex plot web that forms "*True Detective*". This is a *stunning* novel. I was absolutely floored by it. I enjoyed every single page. The true genius of *True Detective* is that Nate Heller is not just running around with famous historical

figures like Elliot Ness: he's also investigating real-life crimes. The beauty of it all is, fact and fiction are blended together so neatly that I couldn't tell where fact ended and where fiction began. And even when I knew what was going to happen, such as in the scene in Miami, I found myself on the edge of my seat, wondering how it would all end. The plot is well-done. It's a complex plot web with a satisfying resolution. Heller investigates multiple cases throughout the book, and at the end you feel they've all come to a close. The story is exciting, full of action and suspense. I *really* liked the ending, though I don't want to specify why. Oh, and there's plenty of sex. It's used wisely, to develop Heller's character, and it isn't as explicit as it could have been. In fact, let me linger on this whole sex issue for a bit. One of the most famous scenes in Raymond Chandler's "The Big Sleep" occurs when Carmen Sternwood shows up at Marlowe's house, naked, giggling, and perfectly willing. (I personally hate this scene, but it's been influential.) Despite having made out with her and every other woman in the book, Marlowe refuses to sleep with her and boots her out. Heller is not quite as stoic as Marlowe, and faced with the same situation, he probably would have succumbed to temptation and deflowered the girl. He's no knight in shining armour - his armour is tarnished, but compared to the other people in this novel, it's positively pristine. Heller isn't perfect and he knows it, but he tries, and that's what makes him a hero in my eyes. The character of Nate Heller is one of the things that justify this book's length--the print edition runs to 480 pages. In my opinion, far too many books nowadays are bloated beyond all belief, but this book never *feels* padded. Heller is a fascinating character and I was genuinely interested in his moral dilemmas, his love life, and his family history. This includes his father's suicide, a tragic moment, especially when we find out why he did it that way. It's every bit as fascinating as the plot, which is fairly complex but which, on its own, mightn't even fit 300 pages. Heller's narrative voice is also great, and he manages to sound tough without swearing constantly. I'm annoyed by characters whose mother tongue seems to be Profanity, but Heller isn't like that. He says the F word on more than one occasion in the novel, and it isn't censored. But these work--they're at highly-charged emotional moments where "Darn it!" just wouldn't cut it. And back in the 1930s, such an expletive had quite a bit of shock value, a detail that Collins doesn't forget. Overall, Max Allan Collins' "True Detective" is a stunning achievement. I'm positively floored by it. The plot is terrific, and the main character of Nate Heller is fascinating. He's tough, he's sensitive. He takes bribes. He sleeps around. He isn't perfect, but he's the best we've got. Collins' style is excellent and keeps you invested in the book easily, despite its length. The book's conclusion is brilliant in its own way. And somehow, Collins manages all this with real historical figures and real historical crimes. [This review was adapted from a review posted on my blog, At the Scene of the Crime, on 20/10/2012.]

In his prime this author was probably one of the best mystery-PI authors. However the last 20 years has produced some really gripping, fast paced action and suspense authors that represent crime like crime it has evolved in today's times. If you read newer established crime-mystery-suspense authors today and then roll back to yesteryear Mr. Collins books seem slow, having too much meaningless dialogue, and with too much romance for my preferences. I like the "Biff, Bam, Pow" and hopping from metropolitan city to city with a view of their streets and people.

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