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A Bomb Built in Hell: Wesley's Story (Vintage Crime/Black Lizard)

By Andrew Vachss



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Andrew Vachss' pre-*Flood* novel *A Bomb Built in Hell* was written in 1973. It was rejected by every publisher, one of whom described it as a "political horror story," others of whom berated it for its "lack of realism," including such things as Chinese youth gangs and the fall of Haiti. And the very idea of someone entering a high school with the intent of destroying every living person inside was just too ... ludicrous.

Readers of Vachss' Burke series will immediately recognize Wesley, the main character of *A Bomb Built in Hell*. This is his story.



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Editorial Review

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Wesley, who appeared in a number of Vachss' legendarily dark Burke novels, is the protagonist of this hard-bitten tale written in 1972, more than a decade before the first Burke novel appeared. It's the story of an orphan who, by the mid-1950s, had spent much of his life in New York's juvenile-detention system before graduating to maximum security. There he meets Carmine, a tough old murderer who educates him to be a better criminal. Wesley comes to see himself as Carmine's son and ultimately as the instrument of Carmine's vengeance. Wesley does his time and, as per Carmine's instructions, becomes a professional hit man. *A Bomb Built in Hell* presages motifs Vachss employed in the Burke novels, but even crime fans unfamiliar with Burke can relish it. Wesley is utterly remorseless, and the story is told in the coldest and sparest of prose. It also features telling period details—e.g., the tawdry and seamy Times Square area of the time, and the homeless who rushed to “clean” the windshields of cars stopped at Bowery traffic lights. --Thomas Gaughan

Review

"Vachss' prose, though not as stylized as the writing that would take the mystery world by storm in *Flood*, is as tight and succinct as Wesley's meticulously planned murders. Every Burke fan should read this novel."
--*Publishers Weekly*, Sept 18, 2000

"Vachss doesn't sugarcoat things in this brutal, detailed piece of work, but that's what makes it fascinating. Vachss' fans will love this example of the author's early writing, which predates his Burke books by several years. Rejected by publishers decades ago due to its high level of violence, the years have not diminished its impact."

—*Mystery Scene*

"History has caught up to Wesley's bleak odyssey, repeatedly rejected for publication decades ago but now unnervingly prescient."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"*A Bomb Built in Hell* presages motifs Vachss employed in the Burke novels, but even crime fans unfamiliar with Burke can relish it. Wesley is utterly remorseless, and the story is told in the coldest and sparest of prose."

—*Booklist*

From the Author

Readers of Vachss' Burke series will immediately recognize Wesley, the main character of *A Bomb Built in Hell*. This is his story.

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Alan Durham:

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