



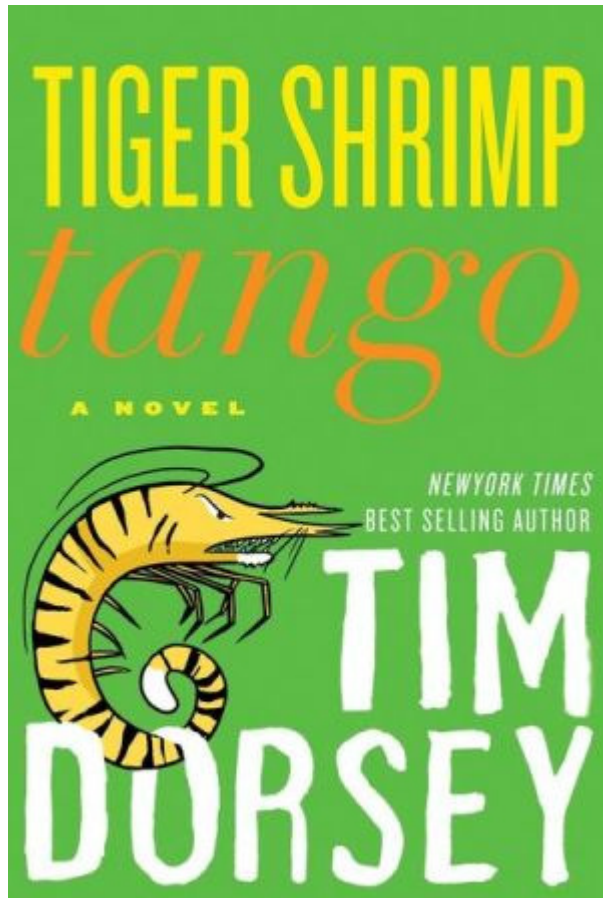
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DAILY NEWS

'Literally could not put the book down'

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"Tiger Shrimp Tango" by Tim Dorsey. New York: Harper Collins, 2014. 306 pages, \$25.99.



“The naked couple ran screaming out of the hotel, covered with fire-extinguisher foam. Which didn’t attract much attention in Fort Lauderdale. A window on the top floor shattered. Broken glass rained down from the high-rise, followed by a toilet-tank lid that exploded in the street.”

So begins “Tiger Shrimp Tango,” the latest novel by Tim Dorsey, the prolific Florida writer who has built a strong following among those interested in the escapades of Serge Storms, the quirky and eccentric crime fighter in all his novels. And the episode above that introduces his latest adventure turns out to be one of the more mundane moments brought to life by the imaginative author. Perhaps it’s best to let Storms set the stage for the tale that follows:

“Florida is the scam capital of the nation, a perpetual daisy chain of old and fresh schemes that boggle the imagination. Ponzis, odometer fraud, counterfeit paintings, foreign lotteries, priceless costume jewelry, bodies stacked in single graves that are resold, repair your credit, learn to dance better, stuff envelopes at home for three hundred dollars an hour, get that new-look cosmetic surgery

by a doctor who blows town when the job is half done, leaving your face with that new ‘Picasso’ look.”

By the way, these run-on sentences are a hallmark of Dorsey’s narrative; he obviously likes to pack the most he can into every paragraph. Moreover, as has been the case with his previous novels, a low-grade humorous vein lurking just beneath the surface tends to meander through the entire story. Witness the following description of how an older couple, who fancy themselves as “swingers,” is taken advantage of by a pair of scam artists:

“The Kensingtons were at least fifteen years older with gray hair, and that was a critical part of the plan when Gustave had reeled them in with discreet emails through a special off-shore website that hooked up such like-minded adventuresome couples,” Dorsey writes. “Imagine the Kensingtons’ luck at finding such an attractive young pair who didn’t mind a little age difference.”

And then the kicker: “An hour later, the Kensingtons stood bewildered with the check in their hand, wondering where their lunch partners had disappeared to. A half hour later, they stood in their living room, wondering where all their valuables had gone.”

“Tiger Shrimp” has all the ingredients essential for an engaging crime-solving drama. It involves the Internet, unscrupulous scam artists, unsuspecting victims, and a fearless anti-hero with lots of personal baggage who is not afraid to break the rules in the name of a higher calling (primarily justice and retribution). Many novels are somewhat predictable; the foreshadowing often gives the reader a sense of what could be just over the horizon. This is not the case with Dorsey’s latest adventure. Several plot twists materialize out of nowhere – certainly I did not see them coming. And even though Storms has a well-established track record, it is still difficult to anticipate his next move, or what surreal circumstances he will confront on the next page.

To truly appreciate Dorsey’s novels, you have to understand Serge Storms, who can be obsessive and even psychopathic. At the same time, he has a strong sense of right and wrong, which often transcends the legal constraints in which most law enforcement officers operate. There were times he reminded me of Columbo, Peter Falk’s famous TV alter ego; i.e., his conversations often ramble in various directions, while at the same time including little tidbits of information that are interesting in and of themselves. At various points during these monologues, for instance, I learned there is, in fact, a Tupperware Museum, I was reminded that Charles Nelson Reilly starred in “The Ghost and Mrs. Muir,” and I was enlightened as to the fascinating connection Marjorie Rawlings (author of “The Yearling”) has to Florida. I even know how to flip a lobster on its back without touching it, thanks to the main character’s occasional forays into trivia.

“Tiger Shrimp” is the 16th novel by Dorsey, who was a police and courts reporter for The Alabama Journal from 1983 to 1987 as well as a reporter and editor for the Tampa Tribune from 1987 to 1999. One of the more successful contemporary novelists, the author is no stranger to the New York Times bestseller list. His previous books include “Florida Roadkill,” “Cadillac Beach,” “The Big Bamboo” and most recently, “Tropical Warning: An Original Serge Storms Story and Other Debris,” a collection of short stories. His style is often compared to that of Dave Barry and Carl Hiaasen; i.e., his prose is nearly always augmented by an underlying absurdity that tends to characterize the events occurring as the story unfolds.

One of his mentors was obviously John D. MacDonald, the acclaimed novelist who used the sunshine state as the backdrop for many of his novels. His “Travis McGee” series bears some similarities to the “Serge Storms” adventures, although Dorsey’s creation is decidedly more idiosyncratic. Many readers may be familiar with the film “Cape Fear,” which was based on “The Executioners,” one of MacDonald’s more successful works of fiction.

As Joe Hartlaub, a reviewer for bookreporter.com, explains, “One would have to be unbalanced to write this book, afflicted to read it, and delusional to understand it. Naturally, I loved almost every word of it.” After staying up way past my normal bedtime because I literally could not put the book down, I wholeheartedly agree with Hartlaub’s assessment of “Tiger Shrimp Tango.” My sense is that you would have a similar experience. So pick up a copy and spend some time with Serge Storms. If you like a wild ride, you will not be disappointed.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.