

The Man in the Blizzard: Hot Summer Plot

Shelf Awareness, July 1, 2008

This is a busy summer for Bart Schneider, bookseller, author and longtime editor of the late *Hungry Mind Review*: in July, he's moving to California to become events coordinator for Readers' Books in Sonoma and in August his fourth novel is appearing, which will lead him back to Minnesota to do publicity. *The Man in the Blizzard* (Three Rivers Press, \$14.95, 9780307238139/030723813X) is Schneider's first set in the Twin Cities and takes place in the late summer in the near future: in the days leading up to the Republican national convention. (The real thing will indeed be held in St. Paul's Xcel Energy Center beginning on Labor Day, September 1.)

The Man in the Blizzard features Augie Boyer, a private detective who likes to smoke a joint whenever the going gets tough (and the going often gets tough). He misses his wife, who has left him. He puts up with his appealing girlfriend. And he is mystified by a new client who draws him into a case that involves masterwork violins stolen by the Nazis from Jewish players and collectors. One of Boyer's best friends is St. Paul police detective Bobby Sabbatini, who quotes poetry as addictively as Boyer smokes reefer and encourages all his friends to memorize lines.

The book has an appealing noir tone ("I took a good look at her. Green eyes and a sweet mole just north of the bridge of her nose") but is comfortably and authentically set in 2008. Schneider respects hard-boiled rules--Boyer is worldly wise, seeming cynical, unable to communicate and love the way the reader wants him to. At the same time, the many wounded people who populate this books come to show their love for each other and politics are clearly left but not in your face.

The violin case, as it were, leads to a wealthy local right-wing man with a deep admiration for the Third Reich who plans to make a dramatic, deadly statement about abortion during the demonstrations and counterdemonstrations at the convention. Boyer's own daughter--a popular, political singer--is the star of one of those counterdemonstrations, and Boyer senses accurately that she is in great danger.

"This book has a political backdrop," Schneider told *Shelf Awareness* during BookExpo America. "But the most subversive aspect of it is the poetry." He quotes Detective Sabbatini, who says in *The Man in the Blizzard*, "Sometimes I wonder why Americans are as afraid of poetry as they are of al-Qaeda." Schneider sought to put poetry in the middle of things, he said, so that "the lines fit the context of the conversation."

Schneider also has filled *The Man in the Blizzard* with references to Twin Cities booksellers and bookstores, including Micawber's and Common Good, "Garrison's store," as Schneider put it. At one point, Boyer remembers a conversation with Schneider's former boss, David Unowsky, "Uno," who owned Hungry Mind. Boyer carries a Hungry Mind bag. And the last name of the woman who hires Boyer is Odegard--also the name of a long-defunct bookstore in Minneapolis.

Bookworld name dropping is not a new thing for Schneider. He is originally from California, where his first three novels--*Blue Bossa*, *Beautiful Inez* and *Secret Love*--were set. "I got City Lights in all of them," he said happily.--[John Mutter](#)