



Never Coming Back (A David Raker Mystery)

By Tim Weaver

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Emily Kane arrives at her sister Carrie's house to find the front door unlocked, dinner on the table, and the family nowhere to be found—Carrie, her husband, and two daughters have disappeared. When the police turn up no leads, Emily turns to her former boyfriend David Raker, a missing persons investigator, to track the family down. As Raker pursues the case, he discovers evidence of a sinister cover-up, decades in the making and with a long trail of bodies behind it.

Tim Weaver's thrillers have been hugely popular in the UK, and now *Never Coming Back* will introduce his beloved character David Raker to American audiences. Set in Las Vegas and a small fishing village in England, the novel is a smart, fast-paced thriller sure to keep readers guessing until the very end.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Tim Weaver has published three novels in the UK and has developed a successful career as a magazine journalist, writing about films, TV, sports, and technology. He lives near Bath, England with his wife and daughter.

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1

When the night came, it came fast. The sky yellowed, like a week-old bruise, and then the sun began its descent into the desert floor, dropping out of the clouds as if it were falling. The further it fell, the quicker the sky changed, until the sun was gone from view and all that remained was a smear of red cloud, like a bloodstain above the Mojave.

The city limits emerged from the darkness about twenty minutes later: to start with just small, single-story satellite towns, street lights flickering in the shadows either side of the Interstate; then, as the 15 carved its way through the Southern Highlands, a brighter, more persistent glow. Housing estates, strip malls and vast tracts of undeveloped land, illuminated by billboards and the orange tang of sodium lights; and then the neon: casinos, motels and diners, unfurling beyond the freeway. Finally, as I came off the Interstate at Exit 36, I saw the Strip for the first time, its dazzling, monolithic structures rising out of the flatness of the desert, like a star going supernova.

Even a quarter of a mile short of its parking garage, I knew the Mandalay Bay would be a step up from the last time I'd stayed in Las Vegas. On my first trip to the city five years before, the newspaper had taken care of the booking and left me to rot in a downtown grind joint called The George. "George," I later found out, was casino lingo for a good tipper. Except the only people doing the gambling at The George were the homeless, placing 25c minimum bets on the blackjack tables out front so they could scrape together enough for a bottle of something strong. This time, as I nosed the hired Dodge Stratus into a space on a huge rooftop parking lot, I passed eight-story signs advertising a televised UFC fight at the hotel in January, and I knew I'd made the right decision to book it myself: last time out, the only fighting I'd seen anywhere close to The George was of the fully drunk kind.

I turned off the ignition and as the engine and radio died, the sound of the Las Vegas Freeway filled the car; a low, unbroken hum, like the rumble of an approaching storm. Further off, disguised against the sky except for the metronomic wink of its taillight, was a plane making its final approach into McCarran. As I sat there, a feeling of familiarity washed over me, of being in this city, of hearing these same sounds, five years before. I remembered a lot from that trip, but mostly I just remembered the noise and the lights.

I opened the door of the Dodge and got out.

The night was cool, but not unpleasant. Popping the trunk, I grabbed my overnight bag and headed across the

lot. Inside, the hotel was just as loud, the cars and planes and video screens replaced by the incessant ding, ding, ding of slot machines. I waited in line for the front desk, watching as a young couple in their twenties started arguing with one another. By the time I was handed my room card, I was ready for silence—or as close as I could get.

I showered, changed, and raided the minibar, then called Derryn to let her know I'd arrived okay. We chatted for a while. She'd found it hard to adapt to our new life on the West Coast initially: we had no friends here, she had no job, and in our Santa Monica apartment block our neighbors operated a hermetically sealed clique. Gradually, though, things were changing. Back home, she'd been an A&E nurse for twelve years before giving it up to come out to the States with me, and that experience had landed her a short-term contract at a surgery a block from where we lived. She was only taking blood and helping doctors patch up wounds—much more sedate than the work she'd been doing back in London—but she loved it. It got her out meeting people, and it brought in a little money, plus she got weekends off too, which meant she could go to the beach.

"You going to spend all our money, Raker?" she asked after a while.

"Not tonight. Maybe tomorrow."

"Do you even know how to play cards?"

"I know how to play Snap."

I could tell she was smiling. "I'd love to be a fly on the wall when you sidle up to the blackjack table pretending you know what you're doing."

"I do know what I'm doing."

"You can't even play Monopoly."

"My biggest fan talks me up again."

She laughed. "You'll have to take me with you next time."

"I will."

"I'd love to see Vegas."

I turned on the bed and looked out through the window. Millions of lights winked back through the glass. "I know. I'll bring you here one day, I promise."

At one-thirty, I was still awake, even if I didn't understand why. I'd been up until four the previous night filing a story, was fried after the five-hour drive down from LA—but I just couldn't drop off. Eventually, I gave up trying, got dressed and headed downstairs.

When the elevator doors opened, it was like time had stood still: the foyer, the sounds of the slots, the music being piped through speakers, it was all exactly the same as I'd left it. The only thing missing was the couple screaming at one another. This was the reason casinos didn't put clocks up: day, night, it was all the same, like being in stasis. You came in and your body clock disengaged. I looked at my watch again and saw it was

closing in on two—but it may as well have been midmorning. Men and women were wandering around in tracksuits and shorts like they'd just come from the tennis courts.

I headed to a bar next to the hotel lobby. Even at one-fifty in the morning I had plenty of company: a couple in their sixties, a woman talking on her phone in a booth, a guy leaning over a laptop, and a group of five men sitting at one of the tables, laughing raucously at something one of them had said. Sliding in at the stools, I ordered a beer, picked at a bowl of nuts and flicked through a copy of the Las Vegas Sun that had been left behind. The front-page story neatly echoed the one I'd been sent down to follow up: Las Vegas, the bulletproof city. While some analysts were predicting a recession inside the next twelve months, America's gaming capital was set to make a record eight billion dollars.

About ten minutes later, as I got to the sports pages, a guy sat down beside me at the bar and ordered another round of drinks. I looked up, he looked back at me, and then he returned to his table with a tray full of shots. A couple of seconds later, a faint memory surfaced, and—as I tried to grasp at it—a feeling of recognition washed over me: I knew him. I turned on my stool and glanced back over my shoulder. The man placed the tray down on the table—and then looked back at me. He knows me too. There was a moment of hesitation for both of us, paused at each end of the room—but then it seemed to click for him, a smile broke out on his face and he returned to me.

“David?”

As soon as he spoke, the memory became fully formed: Lee Wilkins. We'd grown up together, lived in the same village, gone to the same school—and we'd left the same sixth-form college and never spoken since. Now, almost twenty years later, here he was: different from how I remembered, but not that different. More weight around his face and middle, hair shaved, dark stubble lining his jaw, but otherwise the same guy: five-ten, stocky, a scar to the left of his nose where he'd fallen out of a tree we'd been climbing.

“Lee?”

“Yes!” An even bigger smile spread across his face and we shook hands. “Bloody hell,” he said. “I thought when I saw you, ‘He looks familiar,’ but I just never figured . . .”

“Are you on holiday here?”

“No,” he said, perching himself on the stool next to me. “I live here now. Been in Vegas for two years; been in the States for seven.”

“Doing what?”

“You remember I wanted to be an actor?”

“I remember that, yeah.”

He stopped; smiled. “Well, it didn't work out.”

“Oh.”

“No, I mean it didn't work out in the way I thought it would. I spent my first five years in LA trying to catch a break, waiting tables and turning up at auditions. Got some minor roles here and there but nothing anyone would have seen me in. Then I started compering at this comedy club in West Hollywood, and things got a little crazy. Ended up going down so well, I became the act. That went on for a year, then I was offered a job down here in Vegas, as the main compere at this big comedy club just off the Strip. A few months back, I

was offered an even better job by the guy who runs the entertainment in the MGM hotels, so now I travel between here, the Luxor, New York, the Mirage, the Grand, all of them. It's been pretty amazing."

"Wow. That's incredible, Lee. Congratulations."

"Right place, right time, I guess."

"Or you're just really good at it."

He shrugged. "I can't believe it's you. Here."

"I know."

"So what are you doing in Vegas?"

"You remember I wanted to be a journalist?"

"Yeah."

"Well, that did work out."

"Fantastic. Are you working now?"

"Yeah." I looked around me. "Well, I'm working tomorrow."

"You live here?"

"No. I'm just down from LA for the night."

"Doing what?"

I tapped the front page of the Sun. "Writing about money."

"Are you a correspondent or something?"

"Just until the elections are over next year, and then I head back to London. The paper's pretty excited about the idea of Obama, which is why I'm out here so early."

"Anyone's better than Bush, right?"

"I guess we'll see next year."

"How come you're based on the West Coast?"

"I was based in DC last time I was out, but this time I'm here for much longer. So, I'm spending six months in LA to cover the buildup from California, and then I move to DC to cover the last six months from Capitol Hill." I nodded at the Sun again. "Thing is, at the moment, it's still early days, so there's nothing to talk about. Which is why I'm down here trying to justify my existence."

"Not a bad place to come for a night."

"Noisy."

He laughed. “Yeah, I guess it is.”

We ordered more beers and sat at the bar and talked, covering the nineteen years since we’d left home. I’d grown up on a farm, in the hills surrounding our village, but when I headed to London and it dawned on my parents that I wasn’t going to be taking over the running of it anytime soon, they started winding it down and paying into a cottage.

“And then Mum died.”

Lee gave a solemn nod of the head.

I shrugged. “It was pretty much all downhill from there: I helped Dad get the farm sold and moved him into the village, but he could never really handle it on his own.”

“Is he still around?”

“No. He died almost two years ago.”

I hadn’t been back home since.

The conversation moved on and got brighter, Lee telling me how his mum had remarried and now lived in Torquay, how his sister was a teacher, how he was still single and loving it, even if his mum wanted him to settle down. “They flew out earlier in the year, and Mum

basically asked me when I was going to get married, once a day for three weeks.” He rolled his eyes, and then asked, “So how long have you been married to Diane?” He was busy polishing off his fifth bottle of beer, so I forgave him the slip-up. We were both a little worse for wear: him— two bottles ahead of me—on alcohol, me on a lack of sleep.

“Derryn.”

“Shit.” He laughed. “Sorry. Derryn.”

The bar was quieter now, all the men he’d been drinking with earlier off in the casino somewhere. “It’ll be thirteen years this year.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, it’s been good.”

He nodded. “I admire you, man. Envy you too.” He nodded a second time and then sank the rest of his beer. “And now I’ve got to use the can.”

He rocked from side to side slightly as he shifted away from the bar, and patted me gently on the shoulder as he passed. Then he headed to the toilets.

And I never saw him again.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ruth Davis:

Book is to be different for every single grade. Book for children until eventually adult are different content. We all know that that book is very important for us. The book *Never Coming Back* (A David Raker Mystery) has been making you to know about other information and of course you can take more information. It is rather advantages for you. The guide *Never Coming Back* (A David Raker Mystery) is not only giving you far more new information but also to get your friend when you really feel bored. You can spend your current spend time to read your publication. Try to make relationship with the book *Never Coming Back* (A David Raker Mystery). You never truly feel lose out for everything in the event you read some books.

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