

It's a very different book from Haskins' first Murphy novel. Not simply in length but in range of characterization. I truly like all of these people – Jim, Norm, Tita (when do I get to meet her?) and, naturally, the Padre and Murphy himself. Also the plentiful bad guys and the two top cops . . . they all come across as all too real. There's an almost Felliniesque display of characters here and I think that's what will keep readers engaged through quite a heavy plot – not just the plotting but the bad guys' plot in itself.

There's also a most vivid description going on. Despite the legally required name changes, which I actually enjoy, the scene setting is evocative throughout. It's one of Haskins trademarks - although not overdone, strangely it's extremely simple, no overwriting.

Let me tell you this: Like in many compelling novels, the opening scene is perhaps the most compelling in the whole book, driven by a dream-like experience of that falling body, plus the falling hat, and the subsequent reactions and police activity. I was there - and still am.

And if I was a reader who'd never, ever been to Key West, the scenes that follow, especially the one on the hotel roof with its view over the harbor and all the scurrying below, those scenes would have brought me to town on the very next ticket. Totally compelling.

Finnegan's, the Hog's Breath, the Schooner Wharf, the rant about the Churchills ... There's so much in "Free Range Institution" that kept me up all night reading.

**Mark Howell**  
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