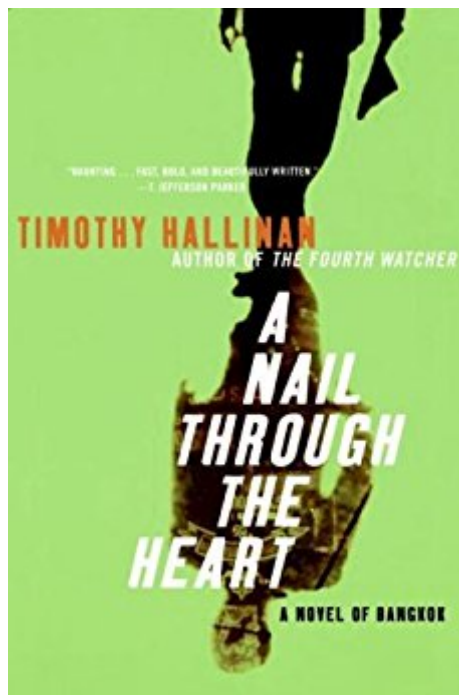




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A Nail Through The Heart: A Novel Of Bangkok (Poke Rafferty Thriller Book 1)



Synopsis

Travel writer Poke Rafferty was good at looking for trouble—so good that he made a little money writing a few offbeat travel guides for the young and terminally bored. But that was before Bangkok stole his heart. Now the expat American is happily playing family with Rose, the former go-go dancer he wants to marry, and with Miaow, the wary street child he wants to adopt. Yet just when everything is beginning to work out, trouble comes looking for Poke in the guise of good intentions. First he takes in Miaow's friend, a troubled and terrifying street urchin named Superman. Then he agrees to find a distraught Aussie woman's missing uncle—and accept an old woman's generous payment to find a blackmailing thief. Soon, these three seemingly disparate events begin to overlap, pulling Poke deeper into dark, unfamiliar terrain. Gradually he realizes that he's been gliding across the surface of a culture he really doesn't understand—and that what he doesn't know is about to hurt him and everyone he loves. Beautifully crafted, relentlessly paced, *A Nail Through the Heart* is an exciting and enticing read that will leave readers hungry for more from the gifted Timothy Hallinan.

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Customer Reviews

After finishing Hallihan's Junior Bender Series in record time I decided to try something different. I posted that the author's writing is great. It's not classic literature great, but he's damn great at what he does. This is a total about face from the Bender series and it's a book that I could not put down. As soon as I finished "A Nail Through The Heart" I immediately ordered the second book in this Poke Rafferty series. This was a read that is not for the faint of heart; it's a thriller that delves into some very dark and disturbing "activities". Unfortunately these activities are all too real and if you don't want to take a walk in that neck of the woods don't pick up the book. Besides the gritty and fast pace of this thriller Hallihan weaves his stories with a haunting beauty and love.

Phillip "Poke" Rafferty is a half Irish, half Filipino American ex-pat travel writer living in Bangkok. He has a series of travel books called Looking for Trouble in..., as in Looking for Trouble in Shanghai or Looking for Trouble in the Philippines. When he came to look for trouble in Bangkok, he lost his heart and he stayed. He fell in love with Bangkok, but he also fell in love with Rose, an ex go-go dancer/prostitute, now turned entrepreneur who is trying to set up a cleaning business. But he really lost his heart to Miaow, an eight-year-old homeless girl, a wary and damaged street child whom he has taken into his life and whom he wants to adopt. He is trying to establish this blended family of himself, Rose, and Miaow. Poke makes a little money with his travel books and articles but not enough to make the adoption of Miaow possible. He needs money to grease the wheels of Thai bureaucracy. His policeman friend, Arthit, offers him a lifeline when he recommends him to an Australian woman who is looking for her uncle who has disappeared in Bangkok. He tells the woman that Poke might be able to find her uncle. She's willing to pay good money for his services. So begins Poke's career as a detective. His investigation into the life of the beloved uncle leads him to some truly horrifying discoveries. The sex trade, especially the use of children in that trade, is a well-known feature of life in Bangkok, but it is impossible to imagine - and I don't want to imagine - the depths of depravity that are reached by the practitioners and customers of this trade. (In fact, my eyes just glided right over some of the passages describing that "business.") And Poke finds that the kindly old uncle is up to his testicles in it. A few weeks before he disappeared, the uncle had hired a new maid, the inscrutably named Doughnut, who has also disappeared. Poke believes the maid is the key to the conundrum and he begins following her trail. He finds the agency that sent Doughnut to the uncle and discovers that before working for him, she had worked for a very rich and reclusive woman. When he visits her, he sees a cruel and terrifying old woman, Madame Wing, who claims to have had something stolen from her for which the thief is now trying to extort money. She

wants to hire Poke to find the lost merchandise and return it. She is willing to pay him handsomely. Meanwhile, his life at home has become a bit more complicated with the arrival of a friend of Miaow's, a troubled and filthy street urchin called Superman. At Miaow's urging, he reluctantly agrees to take the child into his home - temporarily. Gradually, these seemingly disparate situations and events begin to converge and Poke begins to understand something essential about Thai culture and about Buddhism: All things are connected. I found reading this book a bit of a slog at first, but then something clicked and I began to get into it - to empathize with Poke and his somewhat stumbling attempts to understand the culture around him and especially to empathize with the children who are the victims of man's ultimate inhumanity and yet who are tough survivors and full of possibilities. I especially found the character of Rose and the philosophy that has sustained her to be intriguing. She is someone that I like very much. In fact, all of the main characters here are appealing. Timothy Hallinan has done a good job of revealing them to us, I think. They are people with whom I wouldn't mind spending more time.

Timothy Hallinan has at least 3 different series, all of which feature interesting, but flawed, central characters. This series is set in Bangkok and, of course, revolves around Poke Rafferty, a writer who finds or solves stuff in each of the novels and doesn't appear to do a whole lot of writing at any point. This is the first book in this series and doesn't include a lot of back story for any of the central characters, but enough to get things started. There are 2 main plot lines in this one, one involving a missing man who turns out to be a monster and the other involving a missing envelope containing secret information of another monster, this one female, who hires Poke to find it. I've spent some time in Thailand and Bangkok, so perhaps the book is more interesting to me than to others, but I can state unequivocally that Mr. Hallinan is a good writer that spins a good yarn with interesting characters. I recommend this one highly along with all of his other works.

"A Nail..." continues the Poke Rafferty series set in Bangkok with Rafferty being the ex-pat writer cum amateur sleuth. Great story, great characters. For me, the real strength of these particular books is in author Hallinan's compassion and sense of outrage for the vast population of urban poor living in a huge city plagued with monstrous traffic, pollution, official corruption and greed, and most notably in these books, with a revolving door of voracious sex tourists who exploit the poorest and most disadvantaged of the city. This latter ill is at the heart of most of the Rafferty books and gives them a consistent poignancy. At the same time, Hallinan manages to impart the books with wit and hopefulness that keeps the subject matter from becoming overwhelmingly grim. Often enough, there

is appropriate punishment for the bad guys (and women) and redemption for those who deserve it. Timothy Hallinan has three running series that I'm aware of--all somewhat or very different and all extremely well written. Definitely a writer to keep up with.

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