



Sullivan, the daughter of a local police officer. Partridge does a more than capable job of introducing the various parts of Algy's world, including his privileged family history, his girlfriend, Nadie, his skill with a cue stick, and some of the key characters who will play a part in the ongoing series.

The main tension in *Carom Shot* comes from the interplay between the local Providence police department and Carter campus policies, particularly around security, and who is responsible when trouble arrives. In the course of his investigation, Algy uncovers enough lurid secrets about Sullivan to almost excuse a few too many red herrings. The second book in the series, *Straight Pool*, opens up the landscape by moving the action to the coastal Rhode Island town of Westerly, and continues to explore the themes of political connectedness and class.

This brings us to *Scratched*, the third book in the series, where we return to Providence, politics, and the schisms that divide people. This time the story opens up during the WaterFire festival — one of the high points of the new downtown Providence arts scene. WaterFire is a series of popular summer events held on the rivers in downtown Providence. At this particular WaterFire, the body of Italo Palagi, the director emeritus of Carter University's Institute of Italian Studies, is found floating in the Providence River. Palagi and the institute he ran play an important role in the strained relationship between Carter University and the local Italian-American community. At first his death is ruled an accident, but an acquaintance of Algy's, retired state police detective Benno Bacigalupi, piques Algy's interest and casts doubt on the police investigation. Algy already has a vested interest in Palagi's death. Not only did Algy's mother provide the funding for Palagi's institute, helping to forge a tenuous bond between the university and the Italian-American community, but Palagi also bequeathed his estate to that institute. His will, however, is being contested by a long-lost son, and it's in the best interest of the university to protect their financial stake. Suffice it to say that soon Algy is off, investigating Palagi's suspicious death while defending the university's financial interests.

Providence is a fascinating place, and Partridge is good at picking out what makes it special and unique. He grounds the reader in specifics — Al Forno Restaurant, Thayer Street, the convention center — so that anyone who's ever been to the city can feel it unfold. At the same time, he doesn't overwhelm the uninitiated. He also knows his stuff when it comes to the law, particularly (and impressively) around Italian probate law, and campus life. He draws us into the powerful politics that can fuel a university, and usually peppers the story with just enough detail. Anyone who has stayed up late watching nine-ball on TV will appreciate visiting The Shootout Tournament, a plot involving an amateur competition, gambling, and organized crime so detailed it could (and maybe should) have been its own novel.

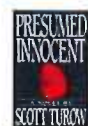
But above all, Providence, or at least the Providence created in these pages, is a series of schisms — between the rich and the poor, between the connected and the forgotten, between the law-abiding and the criminal — and Partridge's greatest strength is his ability to show the effect those schisms have on a community. The book, and this series, is about class as much as it is about murder, though setting much of the plot against the Institute of Italian Studies was an interesting choice, and one that ultimately wasn't quite as successful as the police tension in *Carom Shot*. It's simply hard to care that much about whether an elite institute at an elite university gets funding to survive.

Partridge stumbles a bit on plotting in this installment. This is a complicated story, and the characters and subplots are many and confusing. There is a Ponzi scheme involving a man named Bernie (not Madoff); the city-wide pool tournament involving an entirely unrelated and murky cast of characters; a drawn-out brouhaha over Carter University's renaming of Columbus Day that's somewhat reminiscent of the *Sopranos*' episode "Christopher" (much like while watching that episode, I waded through the pages of this storyline surprised that anyone could possibly care this deeply about a college policy on a minor holiday); Algy's bailout of a line of funeral homes caught up in an accounting fraud; a random visit from Algy's ex-wife; a

[the-red-comes-up\)](#)



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