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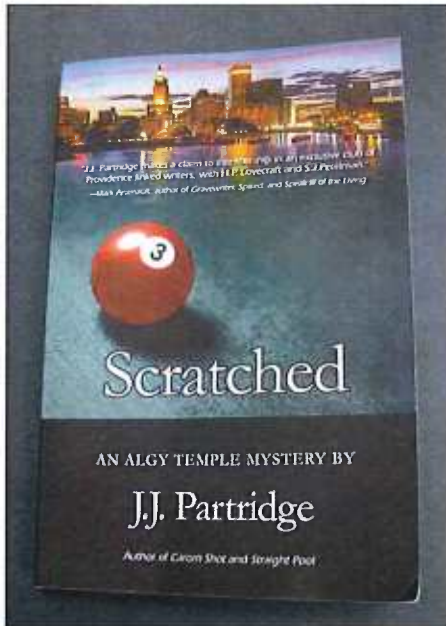
BOOKS

## Scratching the Surface

East Side details spice up third crime novel by J.J. Partridge

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Sitting comfortably, addressing attendees at his recent book signing at **Books on the Square**, the author **J.J. Partridge**, whom most of us know as "Jack," a successful local attorney and founding partner of Partridge, Snow and Hahn, suggests some possible explanations for why his new book **Scratched**, the third in his **Algy Temple** series of mysteries, seems to be doing so well. He points out that most crime novels fall into one of two categories: either thrillers or whodunits. "Mine are certainly the latter, but I like to think they also come well researched, with interesting characters and with enough clues to help someone solve the crime if they want to," he says. But then again, he laughs, maybe his success is nothing more than having the right last name. On the crime novel shelf, having the last name of "Partridge" means he's placed between "Parker" and "Patterson," perhaps two of the biggest names in

the genre.

More likely, it's because Partridge has created an ensemble cast of characters who seem to be gaining some traction. At the core of his three tales is Algy Temple, a white shoe general counsel for the East Side-based Carter University (read: Brown) and who is the scion of one of the oldest and most respected founding families of Providence. He is joined in the series by two of his closest childhood friends. Tony Tramonti, who in the first two books was the head of a successful local contracting company, is now the recently elected, reformist mayor of Providence. Completing the trio is Jimmy Hannigan, a former pool hustler and now owner of a small pool hall/restaurant on Wickenden Street. And finally there's Sonny Russo, Algy's nemesis, who is a talented, colorful, clever and perhaps corrupt ex-mayor, who has the ability to get things done or to get even depending on the situation.

Sound like anyone we know? Flipping through the pages of an Algy Temple novel means taking a delightful stroll along the East Side streets we all know so well. There's Waterfire, the Brown campus, the Boulevard, Wickenden Street, and of course, the Hill. The issues Algy must confront are often based on ones that actually occurred here... or certainly could have. For readers in other parts of the country, one can almost hear a collective "Is this place for real?" Would a University really let its faculty vote to get rid of Columbus Day in a City with an Italian population the size of Providence? Could they possibly elect a mayor like Sonny Russo? Could the mob influence be as blatant as Algy describes it? Who could make this stuff up? "Been there, done that," shrugs Providence.



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What gives the book some extra heft is that Partridge researches well and this, coupled with his years of behind the scenes legal work, gives him particular insights into the way the game is played.

So how does the school's administration deal with its runaway faculty? And what impact will dissing Columbus have on negotiations on how much the school has to pay the city in taxes? But don't worry. There's plenty of action too. Like the retired University professor who's just been found floating in the river, on WaterFire night no less. Turns out he was also an integral part of the Italian Studies Department that is about to leave millions to the school. Oh yeah, and he may or may not have had an illegitimate son who is now about to contest the will. And oh yeah, the Mafia does in fact play a role in the proceedings, but how much is unclear. And... well you get the idea.

Like an Umberto Eco mystery, there's an intellectual override to the plot, but our author is willing to patiently explain things for us... say the difference between Italian and American laws on inheritance (which actually is sort of interesting). Occasionally the plot gets a little too complicated for its own good, like trying to keep track of some of the names when Algy goes off to Italy, but never enough to derail the journey. And of course, since it is an Algy Temple novel, there's pool. In this case it's a national professional pool tournament that's coming to Providence, the brainchild of former Mayor Russo, complete with (wink, wink) controlled off site gambling that will provide much needed income for our cash-strapped city.

In short, Scratched is an entertaining read packed with interesting insights into everything from Ponzi schemes to pool play to life both in the mafia and in the hallowed Ivy League. The book has already been starred as a recommended read by Publishers Weekly. And we're happy to report, J.J. Partridge is hard at work at entry number four in the series. Nice to see Providence has at least one growth industry.