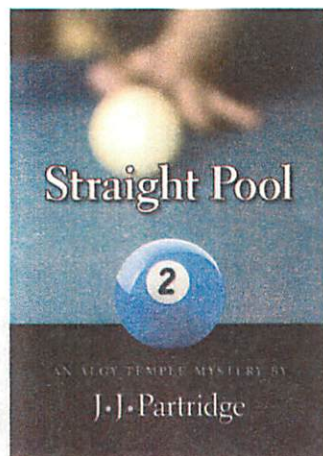


Sticking it to the Bad Guys

A pool playing local sleuth figures out all the angles

Review by Barry Fain



Straight Pool
(An Algy Temple Mystery) by J.J. Partridge
published by Chukar Books; 323 pages

This month marks the 70th anniversary of the Great No-Name Hurricane of 1938 (see our feature story on page 20) which demolished an incredibly large swath of Westerly/Watch Hill, killing hundreds and destroying millions of dollars worth of property. So it's particularly appropriate that we review *Straight Pool*, a Rhode Island based mystery novel that opens with a beautifully written flashback to the Great Storm. Ultimately important to the storyline, the storm also puts us on notice that there are things out there that loom unexpectedly just out of sight that can and will turn everything upside down in a heartbeat.

There's a lot to like in this new whodunit written by East Side resident and lawyer Jack Partridge, the second in his Algy Temple series. Like his protagonist, Partridge is a successful, Harvard-educated attorney who knows his way around the local body politics. But while Partridge has thrived in the corporate world, his alter ego, a well-born, white shoe, corporate counsel for the elite Carter University (think Brown), is someone who is just trying to do his job, sort out his love life and still find time for the occasional game of competitive pool.

What makes the story work so well is Partridge's keen eye for detail. With homes on both the East Side and West-

erly, the author clearly knows every wrought iron fence and hidden garden in both communities and delights in describing them in detail. He prepares the settings as well as the intricate and complicated story that ultimately unfolds with the same painstaking, meticulous attention to detail one would expect from a high-powered attorney. And the touchstones he uses, town-gown power confrontations, backroom Fox Point pool halls, country club meetings, a power hungry mayor, disgruntled Native American tribes, crude, self-made Italo-American developers all will conjure up an array of characters who have all graced the front pages of the *Journal* at one time or another over the past years.

Algy Temple is called in to help his childhood friend Tony Tramonti, a buddy from Moses Brown "Academy," Harvard and Harvard law, who after serving as corporate counsel for his family's international construction firm, has become police commissioner of Providence with an eye towards running for Mayor. Turns out his brother-in-law Charlie Fessenden, a charming, but slick, elitist with a "business IQ matching his shoe size," has gotten himself into trouble (a "bother" he calls it) again. After barely avoiding the SEC over allegations of stock manipulation, Charlie has been functioning as the secretary of a fancy new golf complex in

Watch Hill, while trying to do real estate deals on the side. Just before it was scheduled to open, a mysterious fire levels the clubhouse. The presumed body of the arsonist, a disgruntled former employee, is found inside... with trauma blows to the skull. And with that, the whodunit is off to the races.

Along the circuitous but entertaining path Partridge creates, we get insider views of town-gown battles between an elite university and a power-hungry Mayor who has a campus-sized ego of his own. We also get behind the scenes looks on how real estate deals really shake out as well as some into the interecine inner workings of Native American tribal politics.

What makes the story works, in addition to his well-crafted attention to background details, is Partridge's ability to mix a complicated plot line with the understated presentation of everyday events... a tense game of pool, a trip up the Italian coast, the give-take of trying to make a relationship between two strong personalities work.

East Side readers will love recreating the rambles Temple takes as he meanders along our streets and heads back to his home on Congdon Street or the inside jokes that only native Rhode Islanders will get. Our personal favorite was unexpectedly running into the *East Side Monthly* columnist who offered some astute observers on the City's rough-and-tumble Mayor at the risk of getting his tax assessments re-evaluated.

The pool games are described in meticulous detail (you'd expect anything less?) and while interesting, I must admit they sometimes are given more significance than perhaps they warrant. As background or for character development, fine. But as a vehicle to resolve plot, maybe not.

Still, the book provides a nice twisty-turny ride through Providence and Westerly/Watch Hill, past characters we know all too well, and delivers us nicely to our final destination: a delightful summer read. We're told there may even be a book three on the horizon. Definitely worth a shot, pool or otherwise.