

Book Review: The Black Highway
By Simon Toyne

Thanks to NetGalley and HarperCollins Publishing for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "The Black Highway" has an expected publication date of March 15, 2025.

The title of the latest novel from Simon Toyne might be a bit misleading at first glance. "The Black Highway" isn't really a highway. It's the nickname (I'm assuming Toyne has done his research, and this is accurate, even in a work of fiction) for the River Thames in London. So named for its dark color, and a history of homicide victims set adrift among the currents.

This is also the third book in the Laughton Rees series, but I never felt at a disadvantage for not having read the first two.

The story bursts from the opening pages with (you guessed it) a dead body found along the banks of the River Thames. But not just any body. This one is missing a head and both hands. And it's not the last body that will be found in that condition.

Laughton, a forensic specialist, is pulled into the case not only due to her involvement with detective Tannahill Khan, but the appendage-less bodies seem to trace back to a major international drug trafficking case her father, John Rees, former commissioner for the Metropolitan police, was involved with before he died.

Muddying the waters even further is the sudden appearance of Shelby Facer, recently released from a lengthy prison sentence for his involvement in the case Laughton's father cracked. He's also the father of Laughton's 15-year-old daughter Gracie, conceived during a brief romance when Laughton herself was a teen.

The key to solving the murders may lie in the past; in the boxes Laughton's father has squirreled away in a large storage facility. It's a past Laughton is loath to explore.

The narrative moves along at a fairly brisk and inviting pace, interspersed with flashback chapters to 16-years prior that detail the drug bust that sent Shelby and others to prison, and likely sparked the revenge-fostered killing spree.

There are a few *very* predictable sequences, as well as character behaviors (like not answering cell phones) that seem dramatically out of character for these driven personalities. There are also times where you might want to smack Gracie upside the head and tell her to wake up and smell the coffee.

And of course, there's the major plot twist that you may or may not see coming. I didn't, but then I have a habit of not even trying to guess what's up around the bend.

Overall, "The Black Highway" is an engaging read that will hold your interest. And if it's your first in the series, as it was for me, might tempt you to check out the first two installments. I give it four out of five stars.

And you can check out all my reviews at my Raised on Reading (www.raisedonreading.com) blog site.