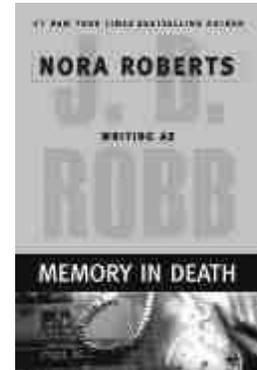


Book review

J. D. Robb mines heroine's chilling past in *Memory in Death*

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The formidable Lieutenant Eve Dallas, her remarkable husband, Roarke, and their cast of eccentric friends are back in *Memory in Death* (G.P. Putnam's Sons), the newest installment in the popular "In Death" mystery series. Penned by *New York Times* bestselling author Nora Roberts under the pseudonym J.D. Robb, the futuristic police procedurals are gritty thrillers highlighted by humor and heart.

Following in the footsteps of witty crime-fighting couples like *The Thin Man's* Nick and Nora Charles, police detective Eve and techno-savvy billionaire Roarke use their complementary talents to solve murders in mid-21st century New York City.

The pair met in *Naked in Death*, the series' 1995 debut novel, and continue to defeat evil masterminds while navigating a rocky romantic road. A decade and more than 20 books and novellas later, the characters are married and only two years have passed in their fictional world.

Robb has created two compelling protagonists -- both battle-scarred survivors of harrowing childhoods who fought their way to professional success. Eve, physically and sexually abused as a young girl, has grown into a no-nonsense, case-closing cop with a reputation for integrity. When she takes a homicide case, the killer doesn't stand a chance.

Her personal life, however, is another story. Growing up without affection or positive role models, she often finds being a wife and a friend more challenging than catching the craftiest criminal. But Roarke has become her emotional center, to her continued amazement. In Robb's latest, Eve reflects on her husband and her new life, thinking, "She had someone waiting for her, and that was her miracle."

Memory in Death is set in 2060, as the couple's second Christmas together approaches. Trudy Lombard, an unexpected and very unwelcome visitor, shows up at the police station. A calculating woman whose sadistic foster care was part of the Eve's nightmarish past, Trudy is looking to blackmail her former charge. Sickened by the memories the woman evokes, Eve escapes to the sanctuary of her home.

Refusing to be denied, Trudy approaches Roarke and threatens to share sordid details of his wife's childhood with the press if he doesn't pay up. When he throws her out, the woman plots revenge but is murdered before she enacts her plan. And suddenly this foster "Mommie Dearest" is Eve's latest homicide case.

Multiple conflicts of interest aside, Eve and Roarke's involvement in finding Trudy's killer makes for a fast-paced and entertaining story. Readers get a new glimpse into the traumatic youth that made Eve such a multifaceted personality. And Trudy is a villain worthy of Charles Dickens.

Murder suspects abound -- from the woman's ill-treated former foster children to her biological son and his new wife. Eve employs a dogged determination, detailed police procedure and the ability to understand the criminal mind to weed through the scores of people who wanted Trudy dead. And Roarke performs his sometimes illegal computer searches to support her investigation.

Fans will be pleased to revisit their favorite secondary characters -- from Detective Peabody and her significant other, Ian McNab, to the pregnant Mavis and the supportive Dr. Mira. Summerset,

Roarke's snooty majordomo, and Eve continue to skirmish and insult, to the satisfaction of both. And someone is still stealing candy bars from Eve's hidden office stash, although it's confusing why she just doesn't load up her AutoChef with the sweets and password-protect them.

Thanks to Robb's world-building skills, it's easy to suspend disbelief when faced with her series' setting. Fifty years in the future, droids perform menial jobs, prostitutes are "licensed companions" and cars can fly. Illegal drugs are still a problem, but they go by cool names like "Zeus." Characters use updated slang words, wear amazing clothes and own clever electronic gadgets.

Little touches like soy-dog street carts and hologram workout programs add a rich layer to a world that is different but -- in all the ways that count -- the same. As expected, good triumphs and evil is vanquished. Sure, the cops use stunners instead of guns and seal their hands when investigating crime scenes, but the killers still go to jail. And people fall in love the old-fashioned way, with all the messy emotions.

The "In Death" novels offer something for every fan of genre fiction. Mystery aficionados get their whodunit fix while science fiction buffs appreciate Robb's futuristic vision. And Eve and Roarke's sexy love life appeals to Nora Roberts' romance readers. A section of Roberts' online message board is devoted to discussion of every aspect of the series -- including who would play the main characters if and when the books are ever made into movies.

One thing readers debate but shouldn't expect is a child for Eve and Roarke. A baby would handicap Eve's ability to be a super-cop and effectively kill the series, the author and mother of two indicates on her NoraRoberts.com Web site. (The "J.D. Robb" pen name comes from the first initials of Roberts' sons, Jason and Dan, and a shortened version of her last name.) So, for now, Eve and Roarke will have to make do with their cat, Galahad.

Fans aren't worried about the series "jumping the shark" -- to borrow a TV term -- anytime soon, since the author has no plans to wrap up her "In Death" mysteries. "Haunted in Death," a novella in the *Bump in the Night* anthology, will be on the shelves this April, and *Born in Death* hits bookstores in July.

Memory in Death is a welcome addition to the ongoing saga of Eve and Roarke.