

Book Review: Desert Star (Renee Ballard #5)
By Michael Connelly

If you need any evidence that we get better at things with practice, look no further than “Desert Star,” the fifth installment of the series built around LAPD detective Renee Ballard. In fact, each book in the six-book series seems to top its predecessor.

It has been a year since a demoralized Ballard left the force. But she is coaxed back by the chief of police who offers her an opportunity to write her own ticket within the department. She opts to resurrect the Open-Unsolved Unit (cold cases). Among the volunteers she recruits is retired detective Harry Bosch, with whom she has built a successful though sometimes tension-filled relationship. Ballard lures Bosch with the chance to work the case that has become his white whale: the murders of the four-member Gallagher family.

At the same time, Ballard’s unit is tasked with solving the cold case murder of a local councilman’s younger sister. There are political ramifications here too in that the councilman has been a key advocate in rejuvenating the cold case unit. Solving the decades old case would be a great win for Ballard and her fledgling unit. Bosch, however, is hell bent on finally solving the case that has haunted him for years, bringing added tension to the mix.

The narrative flows briskly, with the gradual reveals and periodic breadcrumbs making for a true page-turning experience. And in addition to Connelly’s tried-and-true formula of enticing the reader to solve the crimes along with the detectives, there’s the question that nags from the opening pages onward: What are those blue pills in Harry’s possession?

Along the way, Connelly provides solid insight into Ballard’s and Bosch’s personalities and personal challenges. We meet interesting volunteers within the cold case unit, and Ballard – used to taking the ball and running with it – now must learn to wear the new hat of manager. For Bosch, it’s the gnawing reality that he’s not getting any younger.

I highly recommend this latest installment in the Renee Ballard series. And while it can be read as a standalone without getting overly confusing, the experience is best enjoyed starting at the beginning with “The Late Show” which was first published in 2017.

Five stars for “Desert Star.” I thought it was the best book in the series, and then I read the latest installment, “The Waiting.” Suffice to say there’s a new number one.

In short, each book in the series is excellent. And you can check out reviews for each book in the series under the Archives tab on this website.