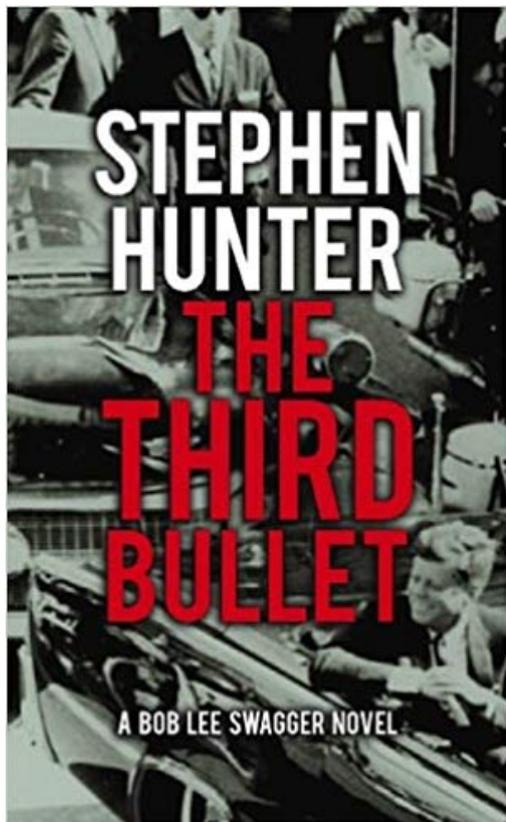


The Third Bullet (Bob Lee Swagger) by Stephen Hunter



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Bob Lee Swagger is on the case of one of the most enduring controversies in history: the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Jr. Fifty years after the shots that brought America to its knees, the tough-as-nails sniper turns his forensic skills toward the most baffling crime of all time.

What really happened on November 22, 1963? Why did the third bullet aimed at John F. Kennedy explode? The Warren Commission had no idea. The 4,000 authors and investigators who followed the case remain clueless. But Bob Lee Swagger knows. With the help of a new clue, Swagger follows a tantalizing path through old records, intelligence archives, and historical buildings back to the sniper's nest.

Pitting the perfect hero against one of history's most infamous crimes, The Third Bullet is Stephen Hunter at his heart-pounding best.



Reviews of the **The Third Bullet (Bob Lee Swagger)** by Stephen Hunter

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As Stephen Hunter's Bobby Lee Swagger is getting on into the Metamucil and Medicare phase of his life, the focus of his escapades have been nudged ever so slightly to the cerebral and away from action. In this installment, Swagger is injected into the never ending JFK assassination conspiracy theory parallel universe that operates with its own unique brand of physics. Swagger is dragged into this mess while investigating the killing of an author researching JFK. As Swagger enters the fray with his Columbo style detective work, it becomes apparent that someone is quietly watching everything and intervening when anyone looks close to connecting the right dots. With minimal backup from official law enforcement and assistance from peripheral players, Swagger is able to flush out the original mastermind.

The tale is related as two stories, Swagger's detective efforts and the diary entries of the 1963 mastermind who engineered the hit on JFK. Hunter has crafted a well designed theory that is consistent with the official Warren report as well as interweaving odd, ancillary clues. Unfortunately, the detective work offers little in the way of good tradecraft and is more dependent on Swagger's insight and epiphanies. The actual gunfights are well rendered, but few and far between. The diary of the mastermind is largely the embellished rantings of an over the top narcissist with a flare for British dandiness, that puts a drag on plot development, slows the pace, and lengthens the story considerably.

There's a James Bond / Spectre quality where unbeknownst to Swagger, he has been in the mastermind's sights ever since beating him to the punch of securing a special Russian weapon back in the Vietnam era. Finally, the notion of a former CIA agent faking his own death and then winding up fantastically wealthy as a Russian oligarch and spending his vast fortune for 50 years of surveillance of JFK crackpots is a bit hard to swallow.

Ber

A present-day hit-and-run homicide draws Bob Lee Swagger -- retired marine sniper and all-around troubleshooter extraordinaire -- into the maze of circumstances, coincidences, and conspiracy theories that is the JFK assassination.

Author Stephen Hunter has clearly done his research on the subject, and nimbly navigates around the multitude of theories, books, and reports (most notably the Warren Commission findings). From a personal standpoint, I have to say that I have never been particularly fascinated by the JFK assassination. The TV movie of Bill O'Reilly's "Killing Kennedy" was pretty much enough for me. So that this book won my fascination is a testament to its narrative effectiveness. And the fact that Hunter could come up with a fresh take on the Kennedy assassination is a tribute to his creative genius.

As with the other Bob Lee Swagger novels, this one is part mystery, part action -- all mixed with a good dose of Swagger's easy-going, aw-shucks, but deadly earnest manner.

Being a firearm enthusiast, Hunter likes to bring a wealth of gun lore and knowledge into his stories. And where else to bring such expertise other than a novel about the Kennedy assassination??? His penchant might come across as excessive for some, but Hunter brings an air of total credibility and authenticity to his depictions of gun technology, handling, and use. He is to firearms what Tom Clancy was to high-tech weapons systems, Pat Cornwell to forensics, and Michael Crichton to medicine/science. As Hunter notes in the author's afterward, "There are some tweaks I purposely

left out to keep non-gun culture people from slipping into a coma..." :-)

Given the epic 50-year scope of the story, the fascinating reworking of totally trampled ground, and some bold narrative choices made by the author, I have to score "The Third Bullet" as one of Hunter's better novels -- which means it's better than just "good," and even "good" Hunter fiction is better than most of the stuff out there. :-)

Phobism

You'll not get a very "fair and balanced" review from me. There are certain authors and their characters who get a pass from my critical faculties - Jack Reacher, Joe Pike, Derek Strange, Charlie Hood, et al. - and Bob Lee is one of them, but for what it's worth and considering the source (me), I still think that "The Third Bullet" is a darn fine book.

Hunter has alternating sections narrated by Bob Lee and Meachum, two men from wildly different backgrounds, and yet, Hunter gets the voices of the Arkansas Marine sniper and the Beltway CIA operative Yalie just right and entertainingly so.

I am not among those who believe in some giant conspiracy in the death of JFK, but I thoroughly enjoyed the what-if premise of this novel. Hunter works off a couple of "facts" and builds a compelling case for a fascinating conspiracy that has just enough "truth" in it to draw you in.

Hunter often apologizes for all of the gun trivia in his books, but I feel that it enhances the narrative - and sends me to the internet to research the guns and companies that he mentions - especially in this book where he often alludes to the history of various American and foreign gun manufacturers. Whether we like it or not, there are ways in which guns ARE the history of the world and command the attention of anyone who is seriously interested in the history of mankind - for good or for ill.

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