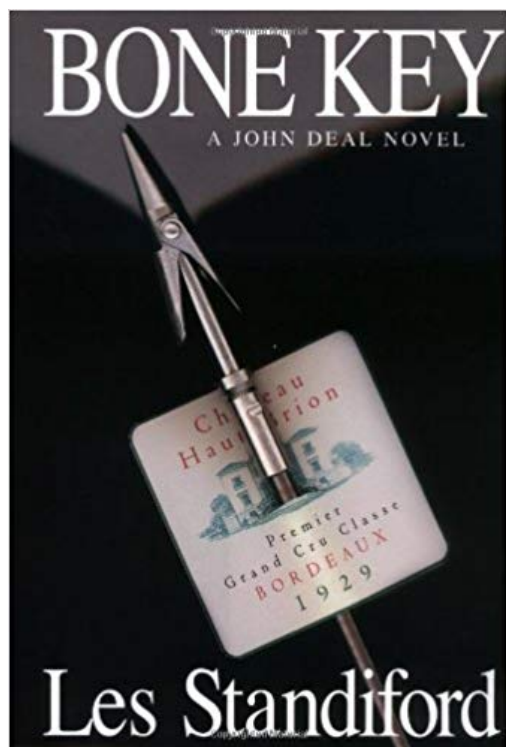


Bone Key *by* Les Standiford



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While on his way down to Key West to negotiate a business deal, John Deal stops to assist a young black man who is being tormented by police on a deserted beach road, and when that same black man is found dead two days later, Deal embarks on an investigation that plunges him into a shocking web of piracy and murder.



Reviews of the *Bone Key* by Les Standiford

Cesar

THE AUTHOR

Les Standiford is a professor of creative writing at Florida International University, in Miami. So, you'd expect an anal-retentive, politically-correct, dilitant, who couldn't write his way out of a wet paper bag. Right? Not Les Standiford. He writes "old fashion" gripping action novels. Do you like Randy White's "Doc Ford" novels? Do you like John D. MacDonald's "Travis McGee? If you do, then you'll love Les Standiford's "John Deal" character and novels.

CAUTION

Like the Doc Ford and Travis McGee novels (and any other great series), the John Deal novels are linked. Once you read one, you'll want to go back to the first and read the series in order. However, "Bone Key" is one of the more independent novels in the series, and is a good introduction.

BONE KEY

"Bone Key" is "Cayo Queso" (literally "Bone Island") which was mutilated into "Key West" by English speakers. John Deel, a Miami developer, son of a notorious developer, is in Key West to consider bidding on a very lucrative project. But, ta da, as many such novels start, he witnesses and becomes involved in unexpected violence which escalates into murder.

The novel begins with what many folks would call a flash back to 1931, but not the usual loathsome flashback (intended to capture the interest of bookstore browsers and only confuses readers). Instead, the "flash back" is in chronological sequence with the novel, and is essential to the novel, setting up the motive.

EVALUATION

The characters are few and easy to remember. The characters are well developed for an action novel. Key characters, male and female, are interesting and appealing. The action is well paced. The reader is given enough information to anticipate many events (which readers enjoy) There are no red-herrings, but there are enough twists and turns to keep the reader re-evaluating his/her guesses. The action accelerates into the climax. Every thread is nicely tied up. Sounds like a textbook on writing an action novel---doesn't it? It's all done right. No wonder Les is a popular professor.

CAVEAT

I found the some of the events around the climax a bit confusing and implausible, but that's easy to forgive.

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Kashicage

The opening sequence is as explosive as any action sequence in the thrilling Deal franchise. This is real pirate, not costume Jack Sparrow. John Deal is grounded in his struggling construction business and his separated but still irritating wife, but he is a magnet for creative and devious thugs and indeed a mysterious old girlfriend all after the French vintage that provoked the introductory mayhem. Some of Deal's adventures stretch credibility, but the salty Florida ambience is as irresistible as the aura of Hemingway hovering like sea fog over these pacy proceedings.

Marirne

I have enjoyed reading this book several times.

THE ORIGINAL

I thought I had this one figured out, for sure I had it right for a change. But no, author Les Standiford had another plot twist in mind for this fine entry in the John Deal series.

Deal is called to Key West by businessman Franklin Stone. Bringing friend Russell Straight with him for the trip, the two men get to learn what the pace in Key West really is as they wait day after day for Stone to find time to meet with them. One evening Deal is approached by a young black man by the name of Desquarius Noyes who has a secret to tell but who wants privacy to do so, privacy that is lacking at the hotel bar. Deal manages to dismiss this meeting when he is overwhelmed by the beauty of the bar's lounge singer, his old high school sweetheart.

While running the next day, Russell and Deal see Desquarius being beaten by police, so they stop to

help out, ending them all in the middle of a fistfight and then in jail. Finally, Franklin Stone shows up to bail them all out. As it turns out, Stone had sent quite a bit of work to John Deal's father, founder of Dealco construction. Stone has a high scale housing development project on Key West that involves an historic site, a job for which Deal has had previous experience. This venture would net quite a handsome profit for all involved, including the natural preserve at its center.

Life in Margaritaville is tarnished when Deal returns to his room to find Desquarius's body, holding in his hand an old wine bottle label. Deal wonders about the significance of this evidence and discovers that it probably came from a priceless Bordeaux from 1928. So how did this young black man come to possess the label, and who would kill for it? Deal turns to Desquarius's grandfather for further enlightenment, only to meet the end of a gun. He also asks his attorney, Rusty Malloy, who collects wine, more about it. And then there's Annie, Deal's old flame, who is living at Franklin Stone's mansion.

I enjoyed this laid back tale of intrigue in Key West. "It was true that paradise tended to cast a certain rosy glow on things. Spend enough time in cosy Margaritaville, you could end up thinking that calamity might mean running out of rum before the sun was up." Deal does not quite fit in as he loses sleep, and nearly his life, trying to find the connection between fine wine and a poor young black man.

Les Standiford has certainly earned his title as a professor of creative writing. He has a way of wording things that is descriptive but not overdone. No sentence is really simple, yet neither is it so complex as to be distracting. He know his way around the language. And, he clearly knows his way around Key West as well. Standiford fills in local lore and detail but not so much that you would need a map to keep up with him. Just enough to give things the right flavor.

There have been six previous entries in the Deal series, all of which fill in some background for Deal. However, none of the pleasure from BONE KEY is lost for not having read them first.

This is a first rate addition to the mystique of Key West. My advice is to sit back with a margarita, put your feet up, relax, and enjoy.

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