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Summer reads

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"The Broken Shore"

By Peter Temple

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$25

It may be summertime in America, but it's winter down under. In Peter Temple's "The Broken Shore," big-city detective Joe Cashin returns to his hometown on the South Australian coast to recover from a run-in with a felon that nearly claimed his life. He busies himself by playing with his dogs, taking walks in the country, and restoring the house his grandfather ruined when he blew himself up on the premises. This could be a novel in itself, with Cashin confronting the skeletons -- literally -- in his closet. But when a local millionaire is brutally assaulted and the three aboriginal youths accused of the crime die in quick succession, he is pulled back into the sleuthing biz.



Cashin is a wounded man. He is greeted by twinges of pain every morning and interrupts meetings to lie on the floor and rest his back. For most of the book, we have no idea what happened to him: Temple expertly ekes out the details of the detective's life while keeping the book's central mystery in motion.

"Broken Shore" veers into Dan Brown territory when Cashin finds a body in the rafters of an abandoned theater, hanging in front of a biblical backdrop. And did he really just spear that bad guy, vampire style, with a crucifix? No matter. Temple -- author of eight crime novels, five of which have won Australia's Ned Kelly Award for crime fiction -- writes so beautifully that even the most ludicrous scenes can win you over. And his paeans to ordinary moments -- sunlight streaming through Cashin's

windows, the joyfulness of his dogs -- lend "Broken Shore" a realism that makes its improbable plot pretty darn believable. So much so that sitting in a 93 degree un-air-conditioned apartment, I could feel a winter's chill.

-- Dipayan Gupta

Next page: Our next pick: What connects poet William Wordsworth to a tattooed corpse?

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