

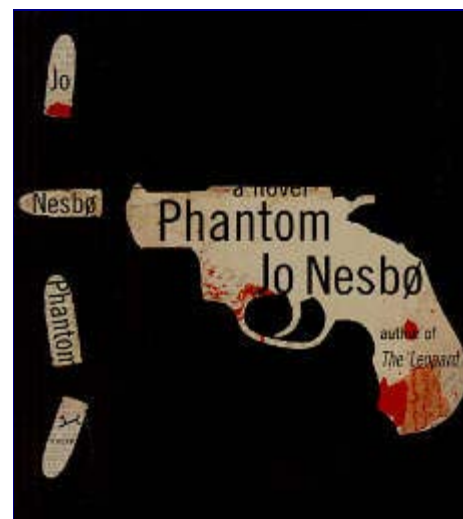
Site Map: [MAIN](#) / [A Reader's Journal, Vol. 2 Webpage](#) [Printer Ready](#)



## *A READER'S JOURNAL*

**The Phantom**  
A Novel  
by  
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ARJ2 Chapter: Reading for  
Enjoyment  
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne  
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When Harry Hole left us at the end of [The Leopard](#), he was so beaten up and ragged-looking that it seemed to us readers that he'd never survive, much less return for another adventure. But heroes of novels have miraculous powers of recuperation, and Harry arrives Hale and Hearty in a new linen suit after spending time in the Orient healing himself.

Heading for one of his old haunts, Hotel Leon, in a seamy section of Oslo, he is accosted by a regal looking prostitute:

**[page 14] The woman's hand rested on his arm as he made to move on. She leaned toward him and breathed red wine into his face.**

**"You're a good-looking guy. How about giving me . . . a light"**

**He turned the other side of his face to her. The bad side. The not-such-a-good-looking-guy side. Felt her flinch and slip as she saw the path left by the nail from his time in the Congo. It stretched from mouth to ear like a badly sewn-up tear.**

**He walked on . . .**

This is our Harry, no doubt about it. In town to clear the name of Oleg (18) who was charged with killing another teenaged druggie, Gusto (19). Oleg was his girl friend Rakel's son and likely Harry's own son, and he has come back to dark and dreary Oslo to clear Oleg's name, to find the real killer, but the real killer, the deeper Harry digs, begins to resemble a phantom, while all the police evidence points to Oleg.

**[page 34] Oleg, who smiles, patiently and indulgently, whenever Harry promised that in the autumn or spring they would go to London to see Tottenham playing at White hart Lane. Oleg, who sometimes called him Dad when it was late, he was sleepy and had lost concentration. It was years since Harry had seen him, years since Rakel had taken him from Oslo, away from the grisly reminders of the [Snowman](#), away from Harry's world of violence and murder.**

Oleg, who said, when Harry visited him in jail as soon as he could, "You're no one to us anymore. You were someone who drifted in, hung around for a few years and then . . . gone!" Then he called for the guard to take him away from Harry and back to his cell. Harry had a son who would rather die in jail than talk to him. How could he help clear his name without Oleg's help?

A *burner* we discover is someone who destroys police cases. "He makes sure that evidence becomes contaminated or goes missing, that mistakes are made in legal procedures, thus preventing a case from being brought to court, or that everyday blunders are made in the investigation, thus allowing the suspect to walk away free." (Page 58) Clearly Oleg didn't have an burner working for him, because an abundance of evidence pointed to him. The case was already old by a year or so and Harry couldn't get anyone interested in helping him re-open it. This would be all on Harry to solve or not.

Tutu got his name from a mistake he made placing a bet for his underworld boss. He had been sent with a bag of money to be laundered by placing a bet on a team in a game that was fixed. Tutu was supposed to bet on a 2-0 score for a game which was fixed. However, Tutu's stutter came out as 2-2 instead of 2-0. He was doomed to be kneecapped by his boss for this mistake, but luckily a new Polish forward whose speaking was as bad as Tutu's misheard the fix and played to win and tied the score 2-2. Two wrongs equal a right, but Tutu compounded his first problem by telling his boss that he placed the wrong bet and the boss shot him in knee before Tutu could explain to the boss that he had won anyway! The morale: Always tell the good news first! From that incident Tutu got his name, from his 2-2 bet. (Page 64, 65)

Harry's job in Hong Kong was an enforcer for large banks. He had lost a link of his finger during a previous adventure, and had it replaced with a titanium finger tip. Rakel notices it as she makes coffee for Harry.

**[page 71] While Rakel was making coffee he saw her gaze fix on his metal finger, but neither of them made a comment. There was an unspoken agreement that they would never mention the Snowman. So Harry sat at the kitchen table and instead talked about his life in Hong Kong. Told her what he was able to tell. What he wanted to tell. that the job as "debt consultant" for Herman Kluit's outstanding accounts consisted of meeting customers with payments that had fallen behind and jogging their memories in a friendly way. In brief, the consultation involved advising them to pay as soon as was practical and feasible. Harry said his major and basically sole qualification was that he measured six feet four in his stocking feet had broad shoulders, bloodshot eyes and a newly acquired scar.**

Harry Hole's a pretty scary guy at this time in his life, enough to get debtors to pay without having to resort to physical force, as least not so far as he revealed to Rakel.

On the other hand, Tord Schultz was an airline pilot who had a neat racket smuggling drugs in from Asia and now an inspector had found a bag full, not of drugs, but of flour on one of his planes, and he was forbidden to fly planes to foreign countries while under suspicion by his employers. Time for him to eject! Time for another great Nesbo metaphor!

**[page 81] If he couldn't fly abroad he would have no value to them anymore. All he would be was a desperate, debt-ridden, cocaine-addicted risk. A man on police radar, a man under pressure. He didn't know much, but more than enough to be aware that he could destroy the infrastructure they had built. And they would do what had to be done. Tord Schultz wrapped his hands around the back of his head and groaned aloud. He was not born to fly a fighter jet. It had gone into a spin, and he didn't have it in him to regain control; he just sat watching the rotating ground getting closer. And knew his sole chance of survival was to sacrifice the jet. He would have to activate the ejector seat. Fire himself out. Now.**

**He would have to go to someone high up in the police, someone he could be sure was above the drug gangs' corruption money. He would have to go to the top.**

Rats of all kinds, small, large, and metaphoric crawl through this novel and Harry remembers what his boss once told him about rats, "A rat is neither good nor evil. It does what a rat has to do." (Page 84)

Gusto is in the process of dying, having been mortally shot and left alone in some foul place, but his voice echoes through the pages of the novel in italics-filled pages as he recounts the episodes which lead up to his being shot, intermingled with Hole's attempts to unravel these same events from the outside, giving us both an inside view and outside view, one placing pieces together in the inside of a jigsaw puzzle, the other placing the edges pieces together, allowing gradually the full picture to emerge. Will it emerge in time to save Oleg's life? Will it emerge in time to bring the phantom killer to justice?

Violin was the street name for a new drug which was replacing heroin and Dubai was the street name for the mastermind who had the source of the new drug(1) . Oleg and Gusto were working for Dubai. Harry questioned Martine, the petite and pregnant woman.

**[page 96] "What do you know about Gusto, apart from the fact that he was attractive to women and came from a foster family?"**

**"He was called 'the Thief.' He sold violin."**

**"Who did he work for?"**

**"He and Oleg used to sell for bikers up in Alnabru, Los Lobos. But they joined Dubai, I think. Everyone who was approached did. They had the purest heroin, and when violin made an appearance it was the Dubai pushers who had it. And I suppose it still is."**

**"What do you know about Dubai? Who is he?"**

**She shook her head. "I don't know if it is a who or a what."**

Violin was like strawberry clover, a weed which is allowed to grow because it acts as a mulch to prevent harmful weeds from growing, while allowing strawberry plants to grow and be harvested. Here's the deal Gusto witnesses which the old man makes with the Oslo city councilwoman.

***[page 127, 128] "And in this little analogy the City Council's vision of a cleaner Oslo is the strawberries, and all the gangs selling dangerous heroin and creating anarchy on the streets are the weeds. While we and violin are the mulch. . . . We don't shoot anyone. We operate discreetly. We sell a drug that does not end in overdoses. With a monopoly in the strawberry field we can raise the prices so high that there are fewer and fewer young people recruited — without our total profit going down. I admit. Fewer users and fewer sellers. Junkies will no longer fill the parks and our downtown streets. In brief, Oslo will be a delight to behold for tourists, politicians, and voters."***

At one point Harry Hole has to inject himself with violin at the point of a gun to prove that he was not an undercover cop, which he wasn't actually, but it was a point which he could only lose by arguing, so he prepared an injection of violin and purposely missed an artery on injecting it. He expected more of an ethereal hymn instead of the full symphony from his "faked orgasm."

**[page 134 135] On Prinsen's Gate he got the delayed effect. Caused by those parts of the drug that had found blood, that had reached his brain via the roundabout routes of capillaries. It was a distant echo of the rush from a needle straight into an artery. Yet Harry felt his eyes filling with tears. It was like being reunited with a lover you thought you would never see again. He ears filled, not with heavenly music, but heavenly light. And all at once he knew why they called it violin.**

Harry finally found Tord Schultz, the drug-running pilot who blabbed to the police, dead from a beetle, a *Zjuk*. Every novel, Nesbo comes up with some new means of murder, and this beetle was the *methode du jour* of the Russian drug dealers to get rid of rats like Tord. A brick with six long nails is dropped from a ceiling beam onto the head of the rat whose ear had been nailed to the floor.

But a phantom used a knife when he snuck up on Harry, held his head, and prepared to sever the arteries in Harry's neck. Doom was certain, but once more Harry escaped certain death, using something special

that only Harry had. Something which kept him alive until he found a suitable weapon to dispatch his assailant. This was not *the* Phantom — but Harry was getting close to the eponymous villain.

Gusto's story and Harry's story began to converge and the end came, in a salvo of bullets from a most unsuspected direction. The only EMT around when Harry hit the ground was a mother rat who inspected his body. She found two holes in Hole's chest and a hole in Hole's head. Was his heart beating? Will Harry once more be resurrected and made whole? To live another episode? Or will the female EMT morph into a Medical Examiner and take apart Harry's body in tiny morsels, a picnic for one?

----- *Footnotes* -----

**Footnote 1.**

Heroin got its street name from the word "heroine." When it first appeared on the street in Philadelphia, addicts would steal old metal junk from the docks to sell to buy heroin — thus the name "junkie" came into being.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

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