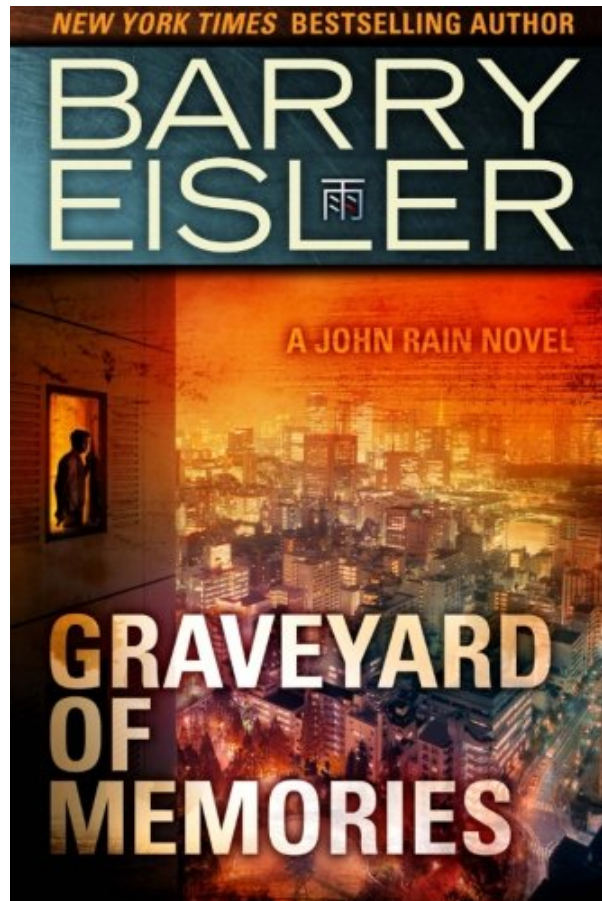
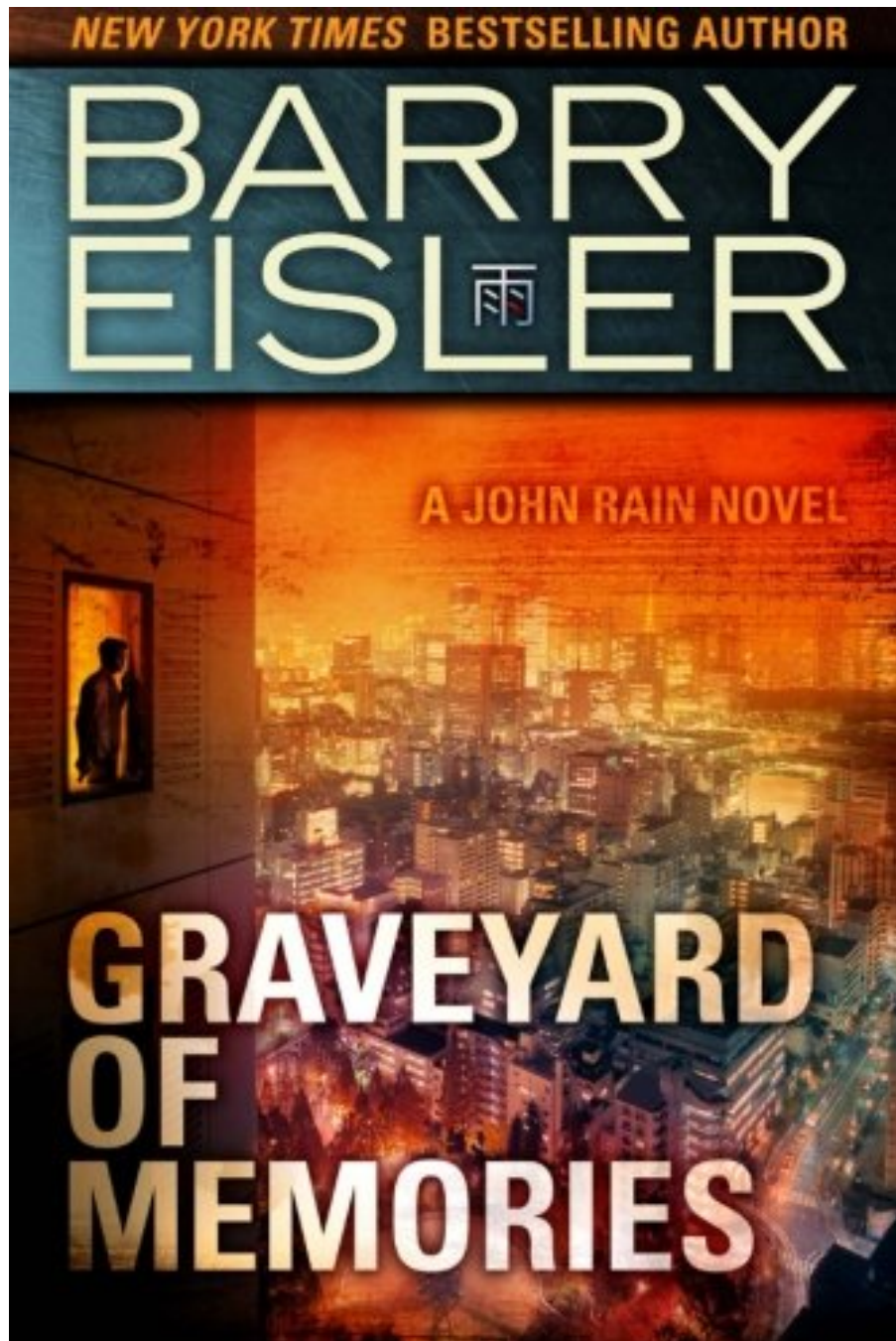


GRAVEYARD OF MEMORIES (A JOHN RAIN NOVEL) BY BARRY EISLER



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What makes a legendary assassin? For John Rain, it was the lessons of love, war, and betrayal he learned in Tokyo in 1972.

Fresh from the killing fields of Southeast Asia, Rain works as a bagman under the watchful eye of his CIA handler, delivering cash to corrupt elements of the Japanese government. But when a delivery goes violently wrong, Rain finds himself in the crosshairs of Japan's most powerful yakuza clan. To survive, Rain strikes a desperate deal with his handler: take out a high-profile target in the Japanese government in exchange for the intel he needs to eliminate his would-be executioners.

As Rain plays cat and mouse with the yakuza and struggles to learn his new role as contract killer, he also becomes entangled with Sayaka, a tough, beautiful ethnic Korean woman confined to a wheelchair. But the demands of his dark work are at odds with the longings of his heart—and with Sayaka's life in the balance, Rain will have to make a terrible choice.

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Most helpful customer reviews

141 of 154 people found the following review helpful.

Back from the dead – sort of – John Rain

By Jerry Saperstein

Barry Eisler had created one of the great characters of modern thrillers, the cerebral, thoughtful, merciless assassin John Rain, whose specialty was murder that looked like it was the result of natural causes. Rain, the offspring of a Japanese father and American mother was terminally conflicted about who he was and what he was. Eisler constructed a perfect character who meticulously plotted out his murders, but was also capable of inflicting lethal mayhem in any given instant.

Bit by bit, though, Eisler let his politics seep into his novels and, worse yet, into the John Rain character. In the last of the Rain novels, then "Requiem for an Assassin", now re-titled "The Killer Ascendant", I concluded that Eisler had fully wussified John Rain and turned his novel into rants for a political philosophy I didn't agree with.

I stopped reading anything by Barry Eisler.

Seven years later and I have the opportunity to read and review what I believe is the attempted return of John Rain.

This is a prequel, taking us back to 1972 and the 20 year old Japanese/American John (Jun) Rain, fresh from the Vietnam War, making his way through Tokyo.

It is an excellent thriller. Eisler has always been an excellent storyteller and he remains one. The book is rich with authentic detail of life in Tokyo, martial arts, the art of savoring tea, details of gardens and cemeteries,

jazz and more. When John Rain attends a dojo, you smell the sweat. When he checks into a “love hotel”, the scent of rushed, paid encounters is in the air. Eisler is ismply brilliant in this.

His characters, beyond the well-honed John Rain, Eisler brings a sense of verisimilitude to Sean McGraw, the CIA chief in Tokyo), Tatu (the Japanese cop Rain just happens to have a social relationship with) and Sayaka, a Korean woman tragically disabled in an auto accident which goes unpunished. Lesser characters such as the yakuza thugs and crooked politicians aren't nearly as well developed, but they are passable and fit into the story.

And the story is of John Rain and his unexpected and rapid progression from assistant bagman to skilled and almost promiscuous assassin. We also see the beginnings of the John Rain who dreams of the house in the suburbs, with the white picket fence.

Eisler doesn't let the reader down: every page tightens its grip on you and keeps you turning, even after the time you should be closing your eyes and fall asleep.

I try not to say much about plot in my reviews, especially of the thrillers, where revealing even the smallest detail may constitute a spoiler for another reader. But I can tell you that Eisler's plotting is tight, his John Rain is deliciously violent and there are few jarring sentences. Eisler does drop in his political views a couple of times, but these references are almost comments in passing. At the end, he does get more overtly political and portrays a highly polarizing character in American history, but he doesn't do this in the same ranting style as in some of earlier books.

Overall, this is an excellent thriller. The reincarnated, younger John Rain lacks the appeal of the older character, but it's still a good read for anyone who enjoys a tightly plotted, well written thriller.

Jerry

82 of 92 people found the following review helpful.

Cerebral/Visceral

By Js

This book is a rich experience by an author at the height of his powers. I sat down and read the first 183 pages before taking a break.

John Rain is not an assassin. He is a 20 year old hot head with skills but no patience, no overview, no wisdom; he's not even good with girls. So this is an origin story. Rain is a bagman for the CIA and at the start of this story he is a manipulated pawn stumbling through a minefield of lethal obstacles by skill and luck. At the conclusion of this book he is a few weeks older, and wiser to the extent that he has learned how little he knows and determined to become the cool and analytical assassin we know from Eisler's earlier stories of the older, more complex man.

And, as Rain says, he does not see the forest for the trees. This week or two set him on a course that will burden him forever with memories and choices that will never leave him.

This is no tired episode from an exhausted franchise. This is a hot story. Lots of action, leanly described. Martial arts stuff I will never understand but that sounds great. Guns, fists, knives, hammers. You get plenty of electricity (hidden spoiler) along with your cerebral stuff. Oh, and romance with an erotic sinew that felt more like poetry than like purple prose.

Besides being a taut violent thriller, this is a travelogue of 70's Japan. Neighborhoods, cemeteries, tram lines, parks, and oh yes, the lovingly described coffee houses that actually exist. I had to drink some drip grind while reading this. And I think Barry writes, or used to write his stuff at a coffee shop in Palo Alto that shall remain nameless. His love of the brew shines through.

I love the details of tradecraft that Rain picks up along the way, often by dint of hindsight. Plenty of: "Oops, I was just a lucky idiot back in that alley. Note to self: spill whiskey on my coat next time". So many times Rain shoots his mouth off and only a second later realizes how stupid he was, and how a moment of self control, a moment of thought would have been so much smarter.

In fact, Rain says, in the first sentence of this story: "If there's one lesson I learned early on during the decades I've spent in this business, it's that of all the qualities that distinguish a hard target from everyone else, among the most important is self control". So "Graveyard of Memories" is Rain's beginning of the journey to learning some control, and some hard lessons. Not lessons for a good life, by any means, but at least lessons in survival.

I am a fan of epilogs. There is a kind of "photographs by the bedside" moment ala "Titanic" and the story ends with a beautiful litany of regrets. But it is too late. It is all too late.

Oh, as a post script there is a wonderful list of some of the author's research sources, and examples of some of the things he is talking about. Websites and YouTube videos showing an exact Martial Arts move from the story, a jazz performance that really exists, buildings. rules for dating paraplegics, and a video demonstrating the scary "21 foot rule" (sometimes you CAN bring a knife to a gun fight).

This novel is a rich experience by an author at the height of his powers.

50 of 59 people found the following review helpful.

"Sentiment is a Weakness"

By Miss Barbara

I've enjoyed Barry Eisler's John Rain series of books since the get-go. In Graveyard of Memories we discover how Rain became the rogue assassin-for-hire as we find him in the later books of the series.

This iteration opens in 1972 with Jun (John) 20 years old and fresh out of Nam working as a bagman for the CIA. When an exchange goes down badly and he kills a street thug who turns out to be a close relative of a Japanese Mafia leader John must choose a course that changes his life forever.

As the book progresses the reader gets insight into the human side of Rain, his heritage via a Japanese father and American mother, his military troubles, the loves and misgivings of his life. Eisler finally shows us the vulnerable humanity of Rain which was not apparent in his previous novels.

When Rain finds out from McGraw, his CIA handler, that he's actually been an integral yet dispensable cog in the USA influencing, via bags of cash, the Japanese political machine he figures out his escape scheme. One high ranking official has been taking the bribe money yet neglecting to direct favoritism towards USA interests as required. John is told that if he takes out this man, Ozawa, and makes it look like an accident he'll be given the Intel on how to wiggle his way out of the conundrum with the Yakuzu (Japanese mafia).

From here on the plot twists and turns are typical Eisler keeping the reader on the edge of their seat while revealing both the history and future of John Rain. Many of the characters that have been in previous (future) books are introduced here to the 20-yr old unsophisticated, wet-behind-the-ears hit man.

This is a stand-alone book that is a good starting point for anyone who has not ever read any of this series. It's also a great fleshing-out book for readers who are already fans of Rain and are curious about his penchant for jazz and high end whiskey. We see him begin to learn from his mistakes. The setting of Tokyo and its environs are fascinating and even though I stumbled through the pronunciation of some of the locations described I could appreciate the word pictures drawn by the author.

I think that Barry Eisler books can all be called "quick reads" even though they are in the 300 page category. The reader hits them hard and the fast pace keeps the pages turning far into the night. I liked Graveyard of Memories and watching as Jun turns into John with his foreshadowing declaration in chapter one: "Sentiment is a Weakness".

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