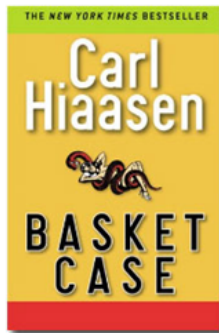




Carl Hiaasen

"Basket Case"

(Reviewed by [Jeremy Baumann](#) APR 22, 2002)



It's two in the morning and I can't find an analogy to describe the frustration of wanting to tell you all about Hiaasen's newest book, **Basket Case**, whilst revealing nada. That alone is my endorsement: you'll stay up way past your bedtime reading this book until you're finished with it. You'll miss it when you're done.

Carl Hiaasen is a 25-year veteran of Florida newsrooms and, like [Lawrence Sanders](#) and [Elmore Leonard](#), he writes wonderfully telling stories of the corruption and anything-can-happen-ness of their state. Throw in a bunch of random folks with their own agendas and quirky habits and you're onto a funny and entertaining read. It's formulaic to be sure, but after ten novels, it still reads as fresh as **Tourist Season**, his first novel.

I can't stand murder mysteries; have I mentioned that part yet? In case not, I can't stand murder mysteries. Never read 'em. This, however, is not a murder mystery. Okay, it is a murder mystery, but it's a murder mystery buried beneath an amazing tale, absurd and wonderful plot twists, fascinating inside information about the workings of a newspaper and the people who work them, and my favorite: real laugh-out-loud humor. The sort that makes people on the subway ask what you're reading, because they want to laugh like that, too. It's not quite funny enough to make a chunk of sandwich come out your nose, but at least funny enough to get milk or soda up and out. It's funny enough you'll wake up whoever's in bed with you with laughter and want to read passages to them.

Intriguing non-sequitor alert: I recently read another book that was surprisingly very funny as well. It was surprising because 1) it was written by [Stephen King](#) and 2) because it is a nonfiction book on writing, of all things. I've never read King before and was shocked to find he's hysterical! His book about writing, entitled: [On Writing](#), I bring it up because King makes very authoritative statements about a number of writer's skills that you can bank on, including Hiaasen's.

Hiaasen's gift, according to Mr. King, is that he is a true master of dialogue. Wannabe writers should study his dialogue, if they know what's good for them. A conversation in one of Hiaasen's books can carry on for pages at a time and somehow he'll not only rarely if ever bore you, but he'll usually manage to develop character, storyline and entertain simultaneously. That's no easy task, especially while making it seamless; his people sound perfectly natural almost always.

This book is a pretzel of a story turned inside out and was a pleasure from start to finish. Have I managed to write a review of it without revealing a drop of the story? Good.

In case you must know, it's about (cover your eyes if you don't want to know) a great reporter who's been banished to the obit column of his paper, and thus killed his career---at a shareholder's meeting---on the yuppie-CEO of the corporation who took over his paper and who raped it of it's integrity for money. Meanwhile one of the reporter's fave old punk musicians dies and his death seems mysterious. The musician's young widow is described as a bit of a [Brittany Spear](#)'s type and doesn't seem too shaken up by her husband's death; she promotes her new CD at his funeral. The young widow is after success, and what was she willing to do to gain it? How will the obit writer and the rising star, her body guard and new producer---a longhaired pretty boy named L'Oreal---come together with a frozen lizard and a missing tape? Oooooo...ahhhhhh...you'll have to read the book to find out.

■ Amazon readers rating: from 4.5 reviews

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