

## King Zeno

Nathaniel Rich

In this deft historical thriller, Rich (*Odds Against Tomorrow*) seamlessly blends fact with fiction as three characters attempt to secure their legacies in the shadow of a gruesome murder, with post–World War I New Orleans as the backdrop. During the summer of 1918, with the Spanish flu spreading rapidly and a weird new music catching on, an ax-wielding serial killer is on the loose. Isadore Zeno, surely the greatest jazz cornetist Crescent City has never heard, finds opportunity in the city’s terror to make his name. Det. William Bastrop, whose marriage has collapsed, sees cracking the case as a path to redemption. Beatrice Vizzini is the head of a crime family whose claim to legitimacy is staked on the construction of a giant canal that will return New Orleans to industrial glory, but her hulking, dim-witted son may derail it. Though these story lines do not converge until the climactic final chapter, they are absorbing enough on their own to keep readers engaged. The period details—most taken directly from the historical record—are expertly deployed. **VERDICT** A solid recommendation for admirers of James Lee Burke’s New Orleans-based “Dave Robicheaux” series and Thomas Mullen’s similarly brainy thrillers (*Darktown; Lightning Men*).

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