



Lush Life – by Richard Price

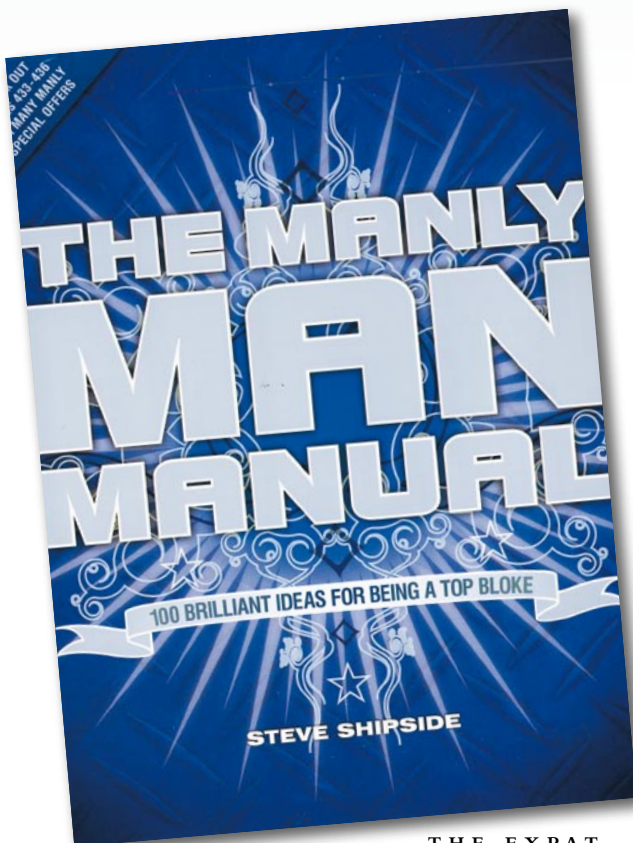
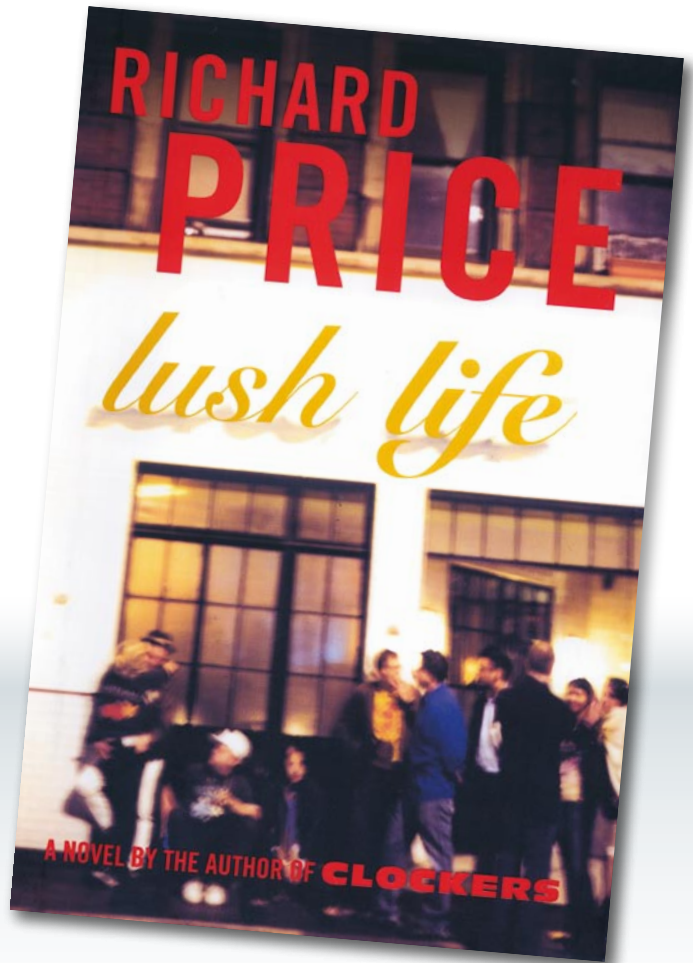
Reviewers have compared *Lush Life* to *Bonfire of the Vanities*, Tom Wolfe’s dissection of New York in the 1980s, a city, where the haves really had it and the have-nots were totally screwed. But Price’s book is more than an update of Wolfe’s book. The have-nots are still totally screwed, still stuck in housing projects a generation on, still selling dime bags of grass, still doing time in prison (“gladiator school”). And while the setting of the book is nominally the newly gentrified Lower East Side, the real setting is an urban hell and purgatory – with not much of a difference between the two.

Price grew up in the Lower East Side projects; the litany of “an hour of endless tight right turns: falafel joint, jazz joint, gym joint, corner. Schoolyard, crêperie, realtor, corner. Tenement, tenement, tenement museum, corner” is the landscape of his dreams, etched on the inside of his eyes. It’s inhabited by rich yuppies, working class Hispanics, old time Irish cops, Chinese sleeping 20 to a room, addicts, hip-hop poets.

The main character is Eric Cash, at 35 an almost-was actor and screenwriter now seating guests at a hip eatery. When a mugging ends in murder, he goes from being a victim to a suspect, kicking off a gruelling, Kafka-esque spiral down through a city of night, fueled by booze and coke and fists and blood. Police from the Quality of Life Task Force prowl the streets in a bogus taxi looking for someone to hassle, someone to bust, someone who will get them a gun; fathers look for sons; men look for the Seven Dwarfs tattooed on the inside of a waitress’ thigh. Everyone is looking for a way out.

After traversing hell and purgatory, the book ends with a chance at redemption – that is, if like Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus*, the characters can bring themselves to say yes to it. – JOANNA HUGHES

And now for something completely different . . .



The Manly Man Manual: 100 Brilliant Ideas for Being a Top Bloke – Compiled by Steve Shipside

Women have had these books for years, titles like *A Year in Suspenders*, *How To Walk in High Heels*, *Three Black Skirts*, *Kiss My Tiara*. However, while women aspire to be goddesses, men simply want to be a top bloke.

Whatever. In keeping with the naff title and the image bank photos, there’s plenty of not-terribly in-depth advice on everything from exercise (“Man of steel . . . or man of jelly?”) to doing housework (all of two pages) to “Winning Ways with Cocktails”. Most blokes or lads or whatever they are these days should buy this book and keep it in the loo. It might give male friends a giggle or impress a girl who has doubts about one’s inherent top bloke-ness. Sow’s ear to silk purse? Who knows? Some of the tips might sink in. – JOANNA HUGHES