



## Funny Money (Tony Valentine Novels)

By James Swain

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When we last saw Tony Valentine - former cop, lifelong misanthrope, and sixty something freelance 'grifter hunter' - he was just coming up for air after a close brush with the afterlife. Now, Tony's back on the case in FUNNY MONEY, James Swain's hardboiled, page-turning follow up to his breakthrough GRIFT SENSE. This time around, it's personal: Valentine's ex-partner Doyle Flanagan has been blown to pieces by a car bomb. Shortly before his death, Doyle had been filling Valentine in on the details of his latest case - an impressive six million dollar blackjack scam at Atlantic City's legendary Bombay casino. Valentine determines that the only way to bring his friend's killers to justice is to crack the Bombay heist himself. But standing between Valentine and his goal is a head spinning assortment of ruthless gangsters, crooked croupiers, eccentric millionaires, Creations with bad haircuts, and one irresistibly enigmatic female wrestler.

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## **Funny Money (Tony Valentine Novels) By James Swain Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

"I can sense when things aren't right on a casino floor and I just take it from there," says Tony Valentine, the cop turned casino consultant who--all boasting aside--finds himself stumped more often than not in *Funny Money*. James Swain's smartly plotted, often humorous sequel to *Grift Sense* sends the 62-year-old Valentine back to his hometown, Atlantic City, where his former police partner, Doyle Flanagan, has been blown up in his car at a McDonald's. Is this murder linked to Flanagan's investigation of a \$6 million blackjack hustle at the city's giant Bombay casino, allegedly perpetrated by a gang of badly coifed Croatians? Meanwhile, Valentine will have to face down thugs who are putting the squeeze on his flaky son, try to appease the Bombay's much-despised owner, and win the help--and heart--of a no-nonsense woman wrestler with a nasty attitude.

Like his debut novel, *Funny Money* is distinguished by Swain's knowledge of gambling scams from card counting to the judicious application of a "monkey's paw" on a slot machine. Less even is this book's character development. Valentine is expertly drawn, and the relationship between him and his late-blooming son is both convincing and heartwarming. But some secondary players are about as thinly realized as a poker chip, and Swain's too-convenient use of violence as a plot propellant threatens to undermine his story's credibility. All in all, though, *Funny Money* is a safe bet. --J. Kingston Pierce

#### From Publishers Weekly

The same warmth, honesty and inside expertise that made *Grift Sense* (2001) a memorable crime debut is back in spades in Swain's second book about ex-cop Tony Valentine, who advises gambling casinos on how to spot and stop cheaters. Swain might not be a Leonard or even a Hiaasen when it comes to a seamless writing style, but he makes up for it with insights into his characters' behavior that inevitably ring true. Tony's relationship with his hapless son, Gerry, is letter-perfect: a father's natural love warring at every turn with a hard man's distaste for weakness. No matter how often Gerry screws up, Tony finds some way to help him. This same ambivalence colors Tony's dealings with Archie Tanner, the brutal, bullying fixer who runs a vast Taj Mahal-like casino in Atlantic City and who now wants to buy his way into Florida's gambling industry. When Tony's ex-partner and lifelong friend Doyle Flanagan is killed while looking for a strange band of shabby Croatian math geniuses who are ripping off Tanner's blackjack operation, Valentine takes over the investigation. But it's not really revenge or the \$1,000-a-day fee that motivates him: it's a weird but finally totally logical belief that the gambling business which preys on human weakness should at least be clean and honest. Stretching that analogy only a little, Swain makes Tony his Don Quixote tilting at blackjack tables and slot machines instead of windmills.

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#### From Library Journal

Former policeman Tony Valentine (*Grift Sense*) operates a gambling casino protection service out of his Florida home. When his former partner and best friend now a PI is murdered in Atlantic City, Tony vows vengeance on the "European," the elusive and resourceful scam artist his friend was investigating. Tony contacts the casino, which has been bilked of \$6 million, and goes to work with surveillance tapes and his own personal network of contacts. Though hampered at times by his adversarial son, Mafia types, and others, Tony wins his game. A smooth narrative, credible situations, and a nervy plot make this second Tony Valentine mystery a highly recommended choice for most mystery collections.

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