

Skinny Dip

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Chaz Perrone might be the only marine scientist in the world who doesn't know which way the Gulf Stream runs. He might also be the only one who went into biology just to make a killing, and now he's found a way--doctoring water samples so that a ruthless agribusiness tycoon can continue illegally dumping fertilizer into the endangered Everglades. When Chaz suspects that his wife, Joey, has figured out his scam, he pushes her overboard from a cruise liner into the night-dark Atlantic. Unfortunately for Chaz, his wife doesn't die in the fall.

Clinging blindly to a bale of Jamaican pot, Joey Perrone is plucked from the ocean by former cop and current loner Mick Stranahan. Instead of rushing to the police and reporting her husband's crime, Joey decides to stay dead and (with Mick's help) screw with Chaz until he screws himself.

As Joey haunts and taunts her homicidal husband, as Chaz's cold-blooded cohorts in pollution grow uneasy about his ineptitude and increasingly erratic behavior, as Mick Stranahan discovers that six failed marriages and years of island solitude haven't killed the reckless romantic in him, we're taken on a hilarious, full-throttle, pure Hiaasen ride through the warped politics and mayhem of the human environment, and the human heart. Charles "Chaz" Perrone fancies himself a take-charge kind of guy. So when this "biologist by default" suspects that his curvaceous wife, Joey, has stumbled onto a profitable pollution scam he's running on behalf of Florida agribusiness mogul Red Hammernut, he sets out right away to solve the problem--by heaving Joey off the deck of a luxury cruise liner and into the Atlantic Ocean, far from Key West. But--whoops!--Joey, a former swimming champ, doesn't drown. Instead, as Carl Hiaasen tells in his 10th adult novel, *Skinny Dip*, she makes her way back to shore, thanks both to a wayward bale of Jamaican marijuana and lonerish ex-cop Mick Stranahan (*Skin Tight*, 1989), and then launches a bogus blackmail campaign that's guaranteed to drive her lazy, libidinous hubby into a self-protective frenzy.

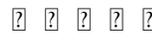
You've got to hand it to Hiaasen: He's perfected a formula for crisply written, satirical crime fiction that makes the best use of imaginatively repulsive villains, as well as less thoroughly venal scoundrels and victims who ultimately overcome their antagonists, all while stumping for the preservation of Florida's environment, particularly the Everglades. In *Skinny Dip*, we find Chaz (who'd rather be golfing than puttering around the "hot, buggy, funky-smelling and treacherous" reaches of nature) falsifying water samples to help Hammernut turn the 'Glades into "God's septic tank." That scheme, though, is endangered not just by Joey's sudden disappearance, but by the suspicions of a python-loving police detective and Chaz's own outstanding inability to tame his Viagra-enhanced tumescence. Even by assigning Chaz a baby-sitter--the hulking, hirsute, and painkiller-addicted Tool--Hammernut can't keep his pet biologist out of trouble. As Joey and Stranahan unfold their revenge plot, and Tool's conscience grows in competition with Chaz's ego, the reader can only marvel at the extent of the train wreck ahead.

As much fun as Hiaasen has delivering Chaz his climactic comeuppance, what's missing from *Skinny Dip* is a more complex, more credible development of Mick Stranahan's character and the relationship he builds with the much younger Joey Perrone. Like Erin Grant, from *Strip Tease*, Joey has far more going for her than her bra-cup size; but "hero"

Stranahan is of far less interest here than any of his fellow players. --J. Kingston Pierce
Carl Hiaasen was born and raised in Florida. He is the author of ten previous novels, including Sick Puppy, Lucky You, Stormy Weather, Basket Case, and, for young readers, Hoot. He also writes a regular column for the Miami Herald.

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