

Suspenseful novel examines our legal system

BY ESTHER LITTMANN
SPECIAL WRITER

Is our legal system about justice or merely about winning and losing? Do the innocent go free or those with the biggest bankroll? That's the topic of former trial lawyer David Gordon's first work of fiction, "NT-GILTY" (Glennbridge Pub., 1996, \$21.95). A guaranteed page-turner, the novel asks what we've all been pondering: How far will a defense attorney go to acquit his client and promote himself?

Gordon's suave and street-smart protagonist J. Bradley Crawford acknowl-

BOOK BREAK

edges no limitations. Hired to represent the amiable but weak-kneed drug-dealing son of the wealthy and powerful Froemmer family in an assault case, Crawford goes beyond the call of duty and decency.

Though the charge against Kenny Froemmer is minor, the stakes are high. An acquittal will mean a fat paycheck, but more important, the family's future legal business for Crawford's law firm. Plagued by financial burdens — a

spendthrift wife, college tuition for the kids and expensive hobbies — the frenetic 40-year-old trial lawyer knows he must win. After all, everyone is counting on him!

Drawing on the moral mayhem and the expert marksmanship of his Vietnam past, Crawford decides to murder the three witnesses to Kenny's crime. Disguised as his 20-year-old client (blond wig tied in ponytail), Crawford kills the young men in a drive-by shooting while Kenny is home with a perfect alibi.

Foolproof, yes? Well, not quite! In the

absence of witnesses, Kenny is, indeed, acquitted of the first offense. But his alibi for the second crime is less than airtight. Easily identified, the petted and pampered future heir soon lands in jail for first-degree murder.

Once more Crawford comes to the rescue of a grateful family that can't do enough for their brilliant and dedicated attorney. Gordon creates the sickening but captivating spectacle of an innocent young man being represented by a lawyer, guilty of the very crime with which the defendant has been charged.

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