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## **Legends of the Chelsea Hotel** *By Ed Hamilton* (THUNDER'S MOUTH)

3.5 stars

Aside from Hamilton's occasional insertion of bland declarative sentences—i.e. "The Chelsea is a mix of permanent residents and transients," he deftly unsews the lining of Chelsea's cheaply stitched secrets with the quickness of a nimble-handed seamstress. The room where Sid stabbed Nancy, the place Edie Sedgwick caught on fire, and the song about Leonard Cohen's blowjob from Janis Joplin are among the most notorious included in his rapid unravel.

Ed Hamilton spent a decade in residency at the Chelsea Hotel, and has undoubtedly collected enough material, from celebrity gods and obscure gypsies, to span 4 volumes of "Legends." But what keeps the book interesting is Hamilton's decision to focus on select characters—be it an eccentric Japanese painter with the nasty habit of destroying his work to prevent unpleasant customers from buying it, or the (largely) unknown classical composer Gerald Busby, whose genius better served the launch of other artistic careers, (like his soundtrack for a Robert Altman film). There's also Hamilton's description of Chelsea residents' drugs of choice. His and theirs. And it's in these little quips about impatient junkies in line for the bathroom and beggars too coked up to ask for change, that Hamilton's quiet brilliance speaks the loudest. When he recounts how he tossed out a deceased designer's drafting table because he knew it was meant for "someone who could tap into the energy of the old designer in a way I wasn't quite able to," one can't help but feel the sting of irony in a wise writer's failure to write about anything besides his failures. Then again, what better way for Hamilton to articulate Chelsea's fusion of art and pain—the very stuff of which legends are made.

*Caira Connor*



