

A Clean Death

Adriaan Verheul

CreateSpace (Dec 31, 2017)

Softcover \$18.95 (320pp)

978-0-692-04769-9

Characters spark interest and philosophical reflection as they speak to deep and complicated questions about poverty, politics, corruption, and loyalty.

Adriaan Verheul's murder mystery *A Clean Death* moves from dangerous cities to vicious jungles, exploring themes of family, bureaucracy, and survival.

Oliver thought he was traveling to the City by the Water to pick up his father's remains. Instead, he becomes entangled in the mystery of how his father, Johan, died while working for GAPI, an international aid organization.

On paper, Johan's GAPI mission looks like a well-intentioned plan to disarm a local tribal warlord, Captain Christmas, and help his fighters reintegrate into society. But Oliver quickly learns that few things are as they seem in the City by the Water, and there are even fewer people that he can trust.

A fascinating cast of characters exude their own personalities, speech styles, and idiosyncrasies through well-paced reveals. Oliver embodies the complicated experience of grief while dealing with Johan's murder. Johan's coworkers and the corrupt police and military are easy to imagine, captured through the tones of their voices and the styles of their gaits.

Captain Christmas and Davey, a young hothead turned accidental pro-gun activist, also play major roles. Captain Christmas and his followers are not as well fleshed-out as other characters, despite their centrality to the plot. Davey is introduced late in the novel and is integrated awkwardly, making him less believable than other characters; he mostly serves as a cipher for commentary on how naive foreigners get themselves into situations they cannot understand.

The main plot revolves around Johan's death, and the mystery of his murder deepens with each chapter. A subplot involving a romantic interest, with witty banter and cathartic inner monologues, has authentic qualities.

Even though some major questions remain at the end of the novel, Oliver, Davey, and Captain Christmas all have stories that include the evolution of characters and end with a sense of closure. Their experiences spark interest and philosophical reflections as they speak to deep and complicated questions about poverty, politics, corruption, and loyalty.

While the story switches viewpoints and timelines, it is always clear who is leading the narrative and when it is taking place. Each character's journey features many places that seem to be written with experience, with location imagery and atmosphere. The intricate bureaucracy of GAPI, the police, and military are all written with expertise and attention to detail.

A Clean Death is a murder mystery with political undertones, filled with intrigue and interest, that questions morality and motivation through the lens of a grieving son.

DELIA STANLEY (March 26, 2018)

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