

Accidental Droning

Pete Liebengood

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At the heart of Pete Liebengood's *Accidental Droning* is a boy learning to be a man. Sort of. This novel is chock full of multiple murders, corrupt cops, even more corrupt politicians, a dead former porn star, a geriatric porn king, hitmen for hire, and everyone having sex with everyone else for money, revenge, political maneuvering, and, occasionally, love. It's a fast-paced, fun read without a lot of depth (by design).

Recently unemployed Bo Granger has a hobby that jeopardizes his wife's gubernatorial candidacy—he likes to fly his drone throughout their well-to-do neighborhood. The problem is, a large part of her political platform deals with privacy issues in our digital age—issues posed by the likes of a common citizen flying a drone around private property unfettered. When the drone records what certainly appears to be a murder, Bo must decide between his marriage and helping to solve the crime.

The story is relevant to today's pressing privacy issues, and Liebengood provides an entertaining setup for a comedic cast of characters that wreak havoc on themselves and each other as they try to navigate self-serving interests with the (rarely invoked) greater good.

Liebengood doesn't use *Accidental Droning* as an opportunity to proselytize on privacy issues in contemporary society. He keeps the story lighthearted, a comedy of the absurd at its core with enough doses of procedural thriller to keep the action hurtling forward.

With multiple characters that are either wholly good or bad, each working toward their own self-serving end goals, *Accidental Droning* often borders on the absurd. Most of the characters are little more than caricatures, which works except when the narrative becomes comparable to an adolescent boy's fantasy play. All the women are big-breasted (the word "luscious" is used to describe women's breasts repeatedly), exceptionally beautiful, either virtuous and nearly virginal or man-eating daughters of Eve, and surprisingly open to varying degrees of sexual harassment. The male-centric gender stereotyping gets tedious early on and never eases up. There is also a great deal of latent homophobia and a dash of racism in addition to all of the outlandish sexism.

The dialogue is clunky at first but finds its rhythm once Liebengood is in territory he seems familiar and comfortable with. Stylistically, the book is given to some questionable similes: a speeding Honda looks like "a wind tunnel on wheels," an "hour-long tumble" in a king bed "featured more holding than in the NFL," and a "perky female fitness host" has "an annoyingly screechy voice and a body tight enough to require thirty-weight Pennzoil to move about effectively."

The pacing is quick and the plot twists absurd but deliberate; realism is intentionally checked at the door. *Accidental Droning* is still entertaining.

NICOLE RUPERSBURG (May 1, 2015)

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