

Clarion Review ★★★★★

MYSTERY

Central City

Indy Perro

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Though its circumstances are harsh, Central City is a thriller with surprising heart.

In Indy Perro's noir thriller *Central City*, the mounting death count of so-called "undesirables" overshadows gang violence as cops and criminals alike struggle to stay ahead of deep corruption.

Central City Detective Vinnie Bayonne has a gift: the clues and state of a crime scene seem to speak to him. When a local bartender is found dead of an overdose and in a staged pose, there are no hints of anyone else being involved. Still, Bayonne and his new partner, Adam McKenna, dive into the investigation. They discover a series of overdoses, all with bodies that were staged in an identical fashion. The bodies continue to stack up, though Bayonne and McKenna have little to go on. Meanwhile, the criminal underworld is undergoing a shakeup as rival groups battle over Central City from the shadows.

In the book's harrowing beginning, two brothers stand up to their abusive, drunken father. This scene closes with an unclear resolution: all three lay still in a growing pool of blood. The text flashes forward to 1992, and it's revealed one of the brothers survived and was recently promoted to detective: McKenna. This knowledge sets the stage for a grim and unyielding thriller that travels the corrupt streets of Central City.

Bayonne is a fascinating anchor character. At the end of his working years and relegated to training a new generation of detectives, his unique talents border on the paranormal, though it's clear that they are a product of years living among criminals and entering their mindsets with lessening reluctance. McKenna serves as a foil to Bayonne because of his working class past and relative innocence. A prime example is how the two react to the unsettling crime scenes: Bayonne observes with a stoic detachment and cracks wise with witnesses, while McKenna turns green and his tragic past rocks his mind.

The characters' snappy banter leaves more unsaid than not. Bayonne, in particular, excels at saying just enough to get his point across. An exchange early on embodies this less-is-more approach: McKenna expresses outrage at how Bayonne treats him despite his years on the force, to which Bayonne quips: "You've been a detective thirty minutes." Bayonne's snarky one-liners capture his voice, how those around him interact with him, and the current state of Central City ably.

The mystery of the alleged overdoses in staged positions hangs over the detectives' heads even as the city threatens to tear itself apart. The detectives' real-time investigation is made to parallel the looming gang war in an intriguing way. The ending is painful but consistent, and it resolves every disparate thread with aplomb, including those involving McKenna's past, the fate of Central City, and the identity of the killer.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (June 12, 2020)

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