

Chicano Frankenstein

Daniel A. Olivas

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In Daniel A. Olivas's wry, entertaining novel inspired by the Mary Shelley classic, a “reanimated” man in near-future Los Angeles searches for love and identity while contending with bigotry and an uncertain past.

Herein, scientists resurrect the dead by reassembling body parts. Millions of “stitchers” are created worldwide; these reanimated beings are wiped of their pasts and often take on menial jobs. One of these beings is a quiet, thoughtful man who works as a paralegal. The unnamed man is conscientious at his job, reads books, cooks, and goes running every day, but he has no family or memories. With “no sense of what it means to be me,” he feels “like half a man” and struggles to hide his awkward, mismatched hands.

When the man begins a relationship with Faustina, a smart, beautiful woman who is a partner at a law firm, they navigate the complications of his origins and social prejudice. Prompted by a children's book that the man possesses, they track down his creator and uncover life-changing secrets. Echoing the themes of Shelley's great work, the man's creator says, “It is one thing to set something—or someone—in motion; it is something else to give that act of creation meaning.”

With witty dialogue and beguiling glimpses of Chicano life, the book probes existential questions about identity and political questions about immigration and race. Interspersed with the man's story are press releases and transcripts featuring the US president, who foments fear of stitchers as part of her Make America Safe Again reelection campaign. MSNBC and CNN news stories add to the clever political commentary.

Chicano Frankenstein makes the most of its sharp futuristic premise with its compelling characters, fast-paced story, and biting political satire.

KRISTEN RABE (March / April 2024)

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