

Clawed Back from the Dead

John F. Rooney

Senneff House Publishers (April 2008)

Softcover \$14.95 (236pp)

978-0-9752756-9-6

“He was caught in a chiaroscuro ballet with the light flickering on and off behind him. He became a part of the movie” the author writes.

Such a cinematic ending to this big-picture crime thriller is unavoidable; the villain is literally incorporated into the medium which consumes him. Readers of detective fiction expect predestined outcomes but the original flair that Rooney uses in plotting and building personalities sets this lively story well above most of the competition. The author's style favors short declarative sentences with necessary rumination inserted into dialogue. He nails the slightly irrational behavior and peculiar verbal mannerisms of multiple New York subtypes while exhibiting a shrewd grasp on the causes of terrorism and its functional purposes. Rooney's style is a little funny though the humor doesn't sabotage a rapid pace of events. Most importantly he scratches into a depth of character development as only a few crime writers like George Pelecanos and Richard Price really bother to.

The returning villain Felix the Cat who is presumed dead is far from a stereotypical terrorist. He announces his presence by murdering the stars director and screenwriter of a movie in production. The film's subject is Felix's years-earlier struggle with NYPD/FBI detective Denny Delaney. It's said of this repeat bomber “Every human being perhaps even a monster like him has some twinge of humanity within him.” He's enraged by Israeli human rights abuses against noncombatant Palestinians but he strives for a solution of two equal states not Israel's annihilation.

When not organizing the bombing of mass gathering places Felix is writing screenplays and critically deconstructing first run films in the perfectly anonymous movie house hideouts of Manhattan. He evades capture by appearing in normal public settings. Unexpected commonality between the two principals plays out in a series of phone calls as Felix uses Denny to deliver his viewpoint to the authorities and the public.

The difference between Denny Delaney and the stock police hero is his reasonably rounded life. The detective once struggled with the clichéd alcohol problems and marital strife but now spends quality time with his wife and arranges regular visits with his retired parents. Denny's remaining off-duty hours are spent at Broadway shows and associating with theater friends. On the job the hero is a sharp thinker and a thorn in the side of his shady superiors. The slower intervals make contrasting action sequences that much more effective.

This is Rooney's fourth novel. In a distracting move of cross-marketing confidence which borders on tackiness each previous title is worked into this story. Words thrown away on that maneuver would have been better spent explaining Felix the Cat's sources of funding and weaponry or exploring the deliciously dangled accusation that the FBI is working both sides of the fence in service of a buried Machiavellian purpose. Perhaps loose ends keep the tale alive for another installment. *Clawed Back From the Dead* provides a show worth the ticket's purchase price; it keeps none of that over-familiar litter which should have been discarded long ago.

(August 21, 2009)

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