



Cooperative Lives

Patrick Finegan

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Ambitious and sophisticated, Cooperative Lives is a diverse and gorgeous tapestry of character studies.

Patrick Finegan's luscious novel *Cooperative Lives* follows characters whose lives change when they are brought into close proximity with each other through a series of coincidences, accidents, and international espionage.

The book's cast at first appears to have little in common with one another, other than the building they share in New York City. Their wounds and disappointments are revealed as they navigate the frustrations of modern life. They make efforts to hide their weaknesses, private embarrassments, and regrets—until an accident, a mistake, and an attempted cover-up inflame their steamy conflicts and secrets.

An investigation, confounded by misplaced assumptions, ineptitude, injured pride, opportunism, and bad luck, results in intrigue with surprising consequences. The story moves forward and backward in time with ease, teasing forth details and offering clues about a deeper underlying story and tangled interconnections.

The addition of an international conspiracy makes it tempting to turn pages at a rapid speed, but masterful prose, marked by evocative phrasing and apt metaphors, encourages savoring each exquisite sentence and its imagery, from "heeled and wheeled travelers scuffled for possession of the asphalt" to "Steam rose from her coffee. It traced curls between the cup and the visor. Invisible currents spun the curls about, feathered them into wisps then swallowed them as they dispersed."

Descriptions capture settings in striking ways, including inlaid marble flooring, antique vases, and carved furniture, or a derelict apartment with a broken heater and a bathroom ripened with mold. Specificity regarding road routes, ski runs, and obscure hiking trails brings places from Squaw Valley to Oahu to life, and the book's knowledgeability extends to the inclusion of facts about historical events and medical conditions and treatments. Characters are credible in their roles as doctors, stock traders, and IT professionals, captured as distinct and complex.

Subtle clues about characters' backstories are inserted with care, revealing the uncertainties and compromises that drive them to make their choices and assumptions. Current events help to anchor the story in time, while tidbits of humor highlight the ironies of the modern world, and a recurring connection in chapter openings ties the pieces together in a creative way.

There's much to relish and ponder in this tragicomedy. Ambitious and sophisticated, *Cooperative Lives* is a diverse and gorgeous tapestry of character studies and is a pure delight to read.

WENDY HINMAN (May 13, 2019)

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