Clarion Review

General

Cuda

Stacy A. Wright
AuthorHouse
978-1-4490-9446-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

Fast-paced, hard-hitting, and suspenseful, Cuda is an action film in novel form. The hero, Navy SEAL Charlie Steiner, is thrust into a world of intrigue, mobsters, and weapons deals—and, at the cost of everything he loves, soldiers forward to save the day. Reminiscent of an early Marvel comic book, Cuda is part science fiction, part action-adventure, and part military drama.

Wright sticks close to the adventure genre's conventions. His men are grizzled, tough, muscled, and hard-hitting and hard-drinking. His women are beautiful, patient, mothering, and playful. Cuda often toes the line of caricature, which is not surprising considering Wright's interest in comic books. In the world of Charlie Steiner, everything is over the top, even cartoonish. The reader's first glimpse of Darien Callistone, a blackmailing mafioso, is like something out of a pre-war Batman strip: "He spins around in the luxurious desk chair so that he is able to gaze at the Atlanta sky line. Some day, all this will be his, along with his father's syndicate…Darien takes a sip of his martini to wet his throat." He is every inch the villain, right down to his polished wingtips. This kind of characterization sometimes seems trite, or overwhelming, but Wright compensates by keeping the plot moving swiftly. With a cast of predictable stock characters, the reader can focus on the events unfurling on the page.

Though this is an unusual book, the best thing about Cuda isn't its imaginativeness, but its speed. Every sentence works hard to propel the story forward. "Before Cuda could say anything, a gun is fired in the corridor," the author writes. "Nicole's body convulses, as two bullets rip through her torso. A sorrowed look crosses her face as she stares into Cuda's eyes, before collapsing to the floor. Cuda can't believe what he has just seen." The novel is told in present tense, which can be quite distracting, and there is little in the way of emotional description, but Wright keeps the story moving and paints a vivid picture of the action. He also liberally uses flashbacks, quick impressions, and props—like Damien's martini glass—to bring

a scene to life. The dialogue is snappy and always charged with dramatic emotion.

Definitely one-of-a-kind, Cuda is an old-school approach to the adventure genre. By calling on the techniques used in early comic strips, Wright keeps the story rolling. His characters are larger than life, and his concepts are highly entertaining. Cuda is a strong start in a direction not often seen in fiction.

Claire Rudy Foster