

Die Laughing

Benjamin O'Neal

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This thriller employs some of the classic tropes of FBI murder mysteries, delivered in a fresh way.

Benjamin O'Neal's *Die Laughing* is a fast-paced thriller that fuses classic elements of horror and suspense stories, from bloody, violent murder to intense, passionate love.

Told in alternating points of view, the novel follows a man called The Killer, who feeds off the terror of his victims; The Cowboy, who finds himself blacking out for days at a time; and Kroh, an FBI investigator working on the case.

The novel opens with The Killer preparing to murder his first victim, Bobby Jordan. At Happy's Comedy Club, The Killer's identity changes to that of a comedian by the name of Robbie Lester, a.k.a The Cowboy. When the Darkness consumes him, he becomes The Killer.

He finds his unsuspecting victim shortly after his comedic performance and lures Bobby in as his prey. Not long after, the FBI investigative team learns that there's been a series of similar murders happening all around town—and that each victim is missing their fingertips.

The Fingertip Killer, whose body count only becomes higher and higher, continues his rampage throughout most of the book. Rotating chapters offer relief from high-octane action. A romance between Kroh and his partner Crystal is explored in just enough detail, providing a different, nuanced layer of tension.

Kroh's first-person perspective, and the Killer's third-person perspective, are both included, and the time between them brings relief from the constant violent and bloody descriptions of the killings. Kroh's scenes are easy to fly through, filled with witty dialogue and a plethora of snappy characters who make up the investigation team. The Killer's scenes are dark and mysterious, adding suspense to the already gripping storyline.

Many characters are introduced, though they are not always fleshed out enough to feel distinct. The narrative's goriness is sometimes painful to read. Instances of backstory, devoted to Kroh's family life, parents, and grandparents, are useful for gaining insight into his character, though some feel unnecessary.

Perspectives sometimes shift within chapters without warning; these switches are confusing. The thriller wraps up nicely, though, with twists and a satisfying conclusion.

O'Neal's *Die Laughing* is a thriller that employs some of the classic tropes of FBI murder mysteries, delivered in a fresh way. The novel offers unique insight into crime and criminal investigations from all sides.

SASHA NANUA (April 20, 2017)

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