

Do I Recognize You?

Glen Goleburn

CreateSpace

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The premise of Glen Goleburn's fast-paced thriller is a scary one: What if facial recognition software could be used on the retail level to target customers coming through the door? What if cameras transferred data to a bank of computers, and the clerk could scan a screen and know people's shopping preferences, spending habits, the credit cards they carry, and even the stores they've visited and what they bought? Goleburn's story takes the scenario a step further: What if an unscrupulous vendor (RSI) shared this technology with a drug kingpin, enabling him to track and eliminate enemies. And what if all that high-tech software gets it wrong, and an innocent person is targeted by the kingpin's hit men?

In *Do I Recognize You?*, Zach Brian is a marine biologist with strong computer skills. He's got an enjoyable teaching gig, interesting speaking engagements in his area of expertise, and he's doing research for his PhD that fascinates him. On the personal side, though, life isn't good. Still traumatized by witnessing his father's death, he is now facing the possibility of losing his mother, too. Then his life really goes horribly wrong: He is nicked by a bullet in a Las Vegas hotel; his blood splatter collected at the scene is linked to crimes in states he's never visited; as he becomes a person of interest to federal investigators, his department chair forces him to take a leave of absence; and someone may be looking for another chance to shoot him.

Readers can readily relate to Goleburn's themes: the way technology invades our privacy; the frightening possibilities of data collection; the security of personal data; and the risks of relying on imperfect machines and their imperfect designers. Zach Brian's disintegrating life will make readers squirm, as they imagine themselves the victims of a store clerk using RSI's customer recognition technology, and wonder about the security of their own data.

After a slow start, due to an overly long explanation of facial recognition technology, the book's action picks up. As Brian tries to elude both government agents and hit men, a nonstop sequence of events, relayed at a breathless pace, carries the story toward an edge-of-the-chair conclusion. Goleburn's character development is less successful.

Do I Recognize You? would be a more engaging read if the author had devoted more time to developing realistic characters. The story is written from an observational distance. The reader is told, not shown, how characters feel. For example, after Zach is reunited with his kidnapped girlfriend, he "sneered at the men, not happy that Lara was traumatized by the ordeal, and very angry that she was sporting a contusion to her right cheek and eye." The result is an entertaining story in which the characters matter less than the action.

KATE FLORA (June 22, 2011)

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