ForeWord Reviews

PULP

Hard Bite
Anonymous-9
New Pulp Press
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This tale of a man, his monkey, and revenge is a skillfully crafted story that is entertaining and fun.

In *Hard Bite*, written in a classic noir style, a car accident caused by a hit-and-run driver changes the life of Dean Drayhart, an "ordinary" insurance actuary. His daughter is killed, he is left paralyzed, his marriage falls apart soon after, and he finds himself with a new mission of ridding Los Angeles of hit-and-run drivers—one at a time.

Perpetrators are tracked down with the help of Dean's pet monkey and best friend, Sid. On Dean's command, Sid kills with a "hard bite" to the neck. Dean has no remorse over his actions and feels great satisfaction from the murders. His prostitute girlfriend, Cinda, appears less comfortable with his mission at times, but the two agree not to focus on "work" when they are together, so they happily remain in their respective criminal professions, and their relationship.

Things take a turn for the group when Sid kills a hit-and-run driver who is the son of Alejandro Malalinda, a Mexican drug cartel leader. Malalinda's surviving family members seek revenge against Dean, and all those around him are put in danger. At the same time, local police are determined to investigate the recent string of unusual deaths in the city and they begin to close in on Dean, too.

Although Dean is committing horrible acts of murder, his personal loss makes him surprisingly sympathetic. Given the nature of the crimes, and Dean's lack of remorse, the tone could easily become very dark and the characters could be difficult to relate to, but Anonymous-9 has skillfully crafted a story that is entertaining and fun. Dean's first-person commentary on his unusual crew and his self-deprecating humor—he refers to himself as "Vigilante Cripple Man" and his car as the "Cripple Coach"—keeps the tone light. Often, he speaks directly to the reader, whom he refers to as "buddy."

In addition to details told from Dean's perspective, other aspects of the plot are revealed

in third-person narrations. Readers learn about Dean's actions, the police investigation, and the Malalindas' revenge plan all at the same time, resulting in an action-packed plot that moves very quickly. Anonymous-9 builds tension early and sustains it throughout, mostly by keeping the main focus on present actions and revealing only the bits and pieces of Dean's backstory necessary to explain his motivation for the crimes.

The novel, while centered around a classic vigilante theme, is filled with unique and entertaining characters. Anonymous-9 fully sustains reader interest throughout, and provides a thoroughly satisfying ending that further reveals the depth of the characters' friendships.

Maria Siano