

Hashtag Good Guy with a Gun

Jeff Chon

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Packed with violence and mordant humor, Jeff Chon's novel *Hashtag Good Guy with a Gun* is unsparing in delivering cutting commentary about contemporary America.

When Scott, a disgraced former high school teacher, invades a pizza parlor with a gun, he's convinced that the establishment houses a pedophile ring. Instead, he stumbles into a hostage situation and ends up shooting the hostage-taker. He becomes an unlikely celebrity, inspiring the hashtag #goodguywithagun and setting off a series of comic and tragic events.

The novel is most concerned with the American male psyche under siege. As the 2016 presidential election unfolds, a host of men who are deluded, adrift, or both are introduced. Elderly Jae, a former IBM employee, is off the deep end and on the run, convinced that a Korean envoy of death is pursuing him. Scott's former student Blake is a buffed-up white supremacist incel who's bent on revenge against Scott for sleeping with his mother. Scott's ne'er-do-well half brother Brian is still coming to terms with childhood sexual abuse and his father's religious cult, which claims that an apocalypse is nigh.

Chon's punchy, acerbic prose weaves these people and narratives together, skipping backwards and forwards in time. The result is a chain of angst and aggression that seems unbreakable, in which bloodshed only begets more bloodshed. He depicts a world spinning out of control, where an argument over Superman and the Hulk plants the seeds for extremist rebellion, where *Catcher in the Rye* is the basis for wild conspiracy theories, and where Scott's accidental heroism is coopted by right-wingers for their own ends.

Eschewing easy sympathy and tidy resolutions to its dilemmas, *Hashtag Good Guy with a Gun* is a bracing, affecting novel that laments a society on the edge of madness.

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