

In All My Sad Dreaming

John Caulfield

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This atmospheric police procedural with a twist is an example of noir at its finest. A series of deaths draws Captain James Blake out of his hospital bed and back to the streets of Cape Town, South Africa. Four musicians seem to be the victims of a murderer's spree, but each death is carried out differently; there is no pattern to point to a serial killer. While some of the deaths look like accidents, the grotesque shooting of Norman Filmer leaves no doubt that this was a murder.

Captain Blake, recovering from a point-blank shooting, questions what is real and what is a product of prescribed medications. Methodically, he interviews spouses and girlfriends, learning about mail order brides, music, and accidents. A photo of the musicians and a successful album, *In All My Sad Dreaming*, hold clues to the deaths. Captain Blake fights a growing feeling of disassociation, visions flitting at the edge of his sight, and confusion as he draws ever closer to the killer.

The first-person perspective creates an intimate bond between reader and narrator. For example, readers are not able to look dispassionately at death. They feel what Blake feels and see what he sees—up close and personal. “On the wall behind the settee, a fist sized mess of blood and gore still clings to the grey wall, and as I stare at the dark stain, a cold emptiness begins to sweep through my soul,” he says.

One feels Blake's fragility and unease; his confusion and frustration are enhanced by strange visions. One incident reoccurs throughout the book: “I scramble out of the chair and hurry towards the door. There is a tinkling sound, and I glance down to see a small silver object spinning on the tiles between my feet...I crouch down to investigate, the curious object vanishes into the ether.”

With a talent for creating an aura of suspense and mystery, John Caulfield holds the reader in his hands, carefully doling out clues and bizarre facts, such as the musical notation of a gull's cry: “She laughs. ‘The cry of the gull—it's an augmented fifth, a special chord. It's always the same interval, you see.’”

The book draws to a close much as it began: “The hospital is behind me now...” Between these bookend paragraphs, the author crafts an intriguing, multi-layered novel. Caulfield resists the need to explain and trusts the reader to understand. He maintains a cat-and-mouse game between author and reader, but fairly played. No withheld clues are foisted at the last minute, no dead ends, misdirection, or convoluted trail of bread crumbs. A few extraneous words do weaken the Caulfield's authority. But this otherwise masterfully crafted, multi-layered mystery will bring pleasure to anyone who enjoys a dark, ethereal, cleanly plotted police procedural.

DAWN GOLDSMITH (July 1, 2010)

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