ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

In Cofeina Veritas! In Coffee Lies the Truth
Cristian Neagu
AuthorHouse UK
978-1-4772-2211-9
Two Stars (out of Five)

Dan Demetriad, private investigator and chief quaestor of forensics (a senior ranking police official), finds himself drawn into a strange and challenging case in *In Cofeina Veritas!*

Beginning with a simple phone call about a missing dog, the case soon turns into a kidnapping that involves the son of a wealthy club owner. Suspects multiply as the case takes Dan and his assistant, Cezar, from the city of Craiova, Romania, to Budapest, Paris, and Bordeaux. Dead ends and dangerous situations abound as Dan and Cezar work their way toward exposing the truth and solving the case.

In Cofeina Veritas! is written in a unique style. Told in first-person present tense, the prose possesses a sense of immediacy. A humorous tone is maintained throughout the book, from Dan's consistently sarcastic commentary to the playful chapter titles (Chapter II: Or the chapter immediately after the first, and Chapter V: or chapter 'vee'). Each chapter is accompanied by effective black-and-white pencil illustrations by Ghita Bizau.

Author Cristian Neagu spent most of his early years in his native Romania, and although not stated in the text, the novel appears to be a translated version, presumably originally written in Neagu's native language. If the book is a translation, the result is often muddled prose and occasional lack of coherence. If it was originally written in English, an editor could have improved the quality of the text. The problem is evident in Dan's description of Cezar: "More of left, and rather a foot, at least a toe, Cezar, young graduate of the Academy and with some interventions from his father, senator on the job, and an influential person in his spare time, I took him under my wing." Awkward sentence construction and numerous grammatical and spelling errors further complicate the language problem.

Characterization is satisfactory overall, although Dan proves rather abrasive as well as excessively sarcastic. His often acerbic humor is present in nearly every line of dialogue, and it occasionally falls flat or feels inappropriate for the particular situation. For instance, when Dan comes upon a sleeping Cezar, he finds it entertaining to pour water on his face and put yogurt

down his pants. While some readers may enjoy this type of comedic style, Dan's mean-spirited sense of humor combined with his overall lack of respect for people can be a turn-off.

In Cofeina Veritas! contains an interesting story as well as a unique protagonist. The story flows at a reasonable pace toward a satisfying conclusion, and Bizau's drawings are striking in their simplicity and prove an asset to the novel.

Neagu is currently working on another novel featuring Dan Demetriad. With a slightly less caustic attitude and closer attention to English grammar and sentence construction, the private investigator may yet appeal to a wider audience.

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