ForeWord Reviews

Ladykiller
Lawrence Light
Meredith Anthony
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Four women have turned up dead in Manhattan, each shot through the right eye with a .45 caliber pistol. Although police detective Dave Dillon is convinced he's dealing with a serial killer, he can't find enough common denominators among the victims' lives to point him in a particular direction. Even so, he must bow to the increasing political pressure coming from the top to solve the crimes quickly, especially as the murders continue.

Complicating the case is all the personal baggage Dillon has to carry. He's the son of a cop who killed himself after being accused of graft. His shrew of a mother demeans him at every opportunity and snipes at him with incessant references to his father's infidelity. Also, Dillon has made a misstep—the nature of which gradually reveals itself—that haunts him emotionally and threatens his career.

As the investigation proceeds, the police conclude that the common denominators they're looking for may lie somewhere in the dull, bureaucratic labyrinth of the West Side Crisis Center, the last refuge for some of the city's most troubled souls. The center is presided over by the beautiful but malevolent Nita Bergstrom, who takes an instant dislike to Dillon—an antipathy that intensifies when her adoring aide, Megan Morrison, begins a relationship with him. The relationship equally distresses detective Jamie Loud, who's forever trying—and failing—to gain Dillon's affection.

The authors populate this grimy morality tale with splendidly drawn supporting characters—among them Ace Cronen, the deranged street hustler who risks his life to win cold Nita's favor; Finesse, the oily police informant; Falstaff, the well-spoken wino; and crime reporter Jimmy Conlon, who has to aggressively cover the murders without infringing on his close friendship with Dillon.

Light has written for *Forbes*, *Business Week*, and *Newsday*, and he is the author of *Too Rich to Live* and *Fear & Greed*. Anthony's work has appeared in *MAD* Magazine and *Hysteria*. She is the co-author of *1*01 Reasons Why We're Doomed*.

Occasionally, the authors' prose turn a bit purple; but even their worst verbal excesses succeed in establishing the properly foreboding: "The day had grown old and the last

watercolors of sundown were falling in the western sky when Dave reached the crime scene. The yellow police tape had already been ripped apart by tenants needing access to the apartment house door before which [the victim] had died. His blood stained the sidewalk like a scarlet obscenity. Westward, where the array of looming buildings drank in the last of the day's blues and pinks, the shadows were coming out of their lairs."

Ladykiller is well-plotted, absorbingly populated, and set against a cityscape that adds its own layer of drama. Even after the crimes are unraveled, there remains one final shocking surprise.

Edward Morris