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**Clarion Review** ★★★☆☆ **THRILLER**

## Last Breath

**David Swendsen**
CreateSpace (Feb 12, 2013)
Softcover $17.95 (260pp)
978-1-4793-8102-9

*Skillfully crafted,* Last Breath *is an eye-opening look at the horrors of child prostitution.*

With a brisk pace, David Swendsen's novel *Last Breath* depicts the evils of an odious child prostitution network operating throughout South America, the United States, and Canada. It details the horrific conditions for kidnapped prostitutes as young as eight, the greed and callous disregard of their captors, the depravity of their molesters, and the relentless pursuit of police dedicated to rescuing the children and prosecuting their abductors. Written by a retired law enforcement officer, this book is truly an eye-opener for anyone interested in a crime with victims in the millions worldwide.

*Last Breath* begins with a vivid description of the bodies of three scantily clad teen girls, murdered and abandoned. For Lieutenant Tom Provens, the Massachusetts State Police investigating officer, it's the start of a long, tough investigation that uncovers an intercontinental network of kidnapping, child prostitution, and murder. With bone-chilling detail, Swendsen unmasks a warped devil incarnate, the self-appointed Sir William, manipulating his venal empire of "landlords" and enforcers and their hideaway houses of depravity, where prostitutes either submit to the house rules or lose their "last breath."

For Provens, the investigation hits home when his niece is kidnapped and he hooks up with Emanuel Picano, a father searching for his own abducted child. In their frenzied chase across continents, the two trace Sir William as he changes names and locations and brutally eliminates witnesses before encountering the shadowy, little-known Shuar tribe of Ecuador, for whom his head is more important than his empire.

*Last Breath* knits aspects of fiction and nonfiction, but sometimes raggedly, as when the narrative is interrupted by didactic passages with facts and statistics about child prostitution. This information would be better presented as dialogue between the characters. The dialogue itself is strong, especially in the scenes where two sixteen-year-old escapees, GorgeousGirl and LoverGirl, flee their enforcer in a stolen pizza delivery car headed to Canada. The two are memorable for their spunk, while others like Provens's niece exhibit their courage in defying the enforcers despite degrading physical abuse.

The plot pulses with well-paced, skillfully crafted episodes such as the police takedowns of various houses. The enforcer's plans to "educate" Provens's niece are decidedly frightening, and the stories depicting the kidnapping of the victims are a parent's worst nightmare. The wraparound cover art of crumpled bedsheets is technically very good but too abstract to convey much about the content of the book. The recognition that the novel definitely deserves could be enhanced by a preface that states what is fiction and what is fact, and references source material.

In all, *Last Breath* is a recommended read for the importance of its subject matter.

WAYNE CUNNINGHAM (April 14, 2014)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a*

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