ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

THRILLER

Lily's Payback
Andy Rose
CreateSpace
978-1-4775-9770-5
Three Stars (out of Five)

Lily's Payback, the compelling debut novel from former teacher Andy Rose, examines the intertwining of love, justice, and revenge. When Kyle Ferguson, brother of the Lily in the title, is gruesomely murdered while attempting to make a discovery that would reduce American dependence on oil, his twin sister vows vengeance with an oath to her Scottish ancestors.

In the New York City school where Lily teaches, she gets to know her fellow educators, Italian-American Bobby, Jewish Daniel, and African-American Mimi. While the four develop romances and support Lily in her grief, a Caucasian police officer, Reggie, and his Latina partner, Sonia, chase down leads in Kyle's case as the body count rises. The perpetrator is Zakov, a Mongolian-Russian mobster with a tortured past who leaves violence in his wake. Meanwhile, scheming oil executives plot something sinister. The majority of these plot threads come together in a thrilling climax and an exciting denouement.

Rose delves into the grittiness of the New York setting with the same depth with which he plumbs the personality and heritage of each character. These rich characterizations result in a welcome change from many novels that make no mention of character ancestry. While Bobby's mafia connections and love of opera coupled with Lily's references to Rob Roy sometimes teeter on ethnic stereotypes, passages of Italian, Gaelic, and Russian that can be understood through context clues keep the characterizations firmly grounded. In fact, readers come to know so much about each player from that character's viewpoint that the title is misleading, as it implies the story is mainly Lily's.

In fact, the book could be more accurately described as having an ensemble cast, with no one character emerging as the clear protagonist. The lack of focus on Lily promised by the title is discouraging because her grief, desire for vengeance, and physical strength make her a strong woman to be reckoned with. One wishes she emerged as the main character. Unfortunate, too, is the author's attempt to develop important action in summary paragraphs and tendency to jump from scenes filled with immediacy to merely reporting what happened after an incident. For

example, Bobby gets shot and slips into a coma only to have recovered from this trauma with a minor concussion by the beginning of the next chapter.

Ultimately, though, such hiccups prove minor to anyone who enjoys a tight plot, suspenseful action, a nuanced interplay among players, and an ethnically diverse cast.

Jill Allen