



Mickey Maux Muddles a Murder: And Solves Adler's Problem

Philip Emma

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Fast moving and often fun, Mickey Maux Muddles a Murder is a puzzler that pleases.

Philip Emma's quirky mystery novel *Mickey Maux Muddles a Murder* follows a private detective as he investigates a double murder in his quiet Connecticut hometown.

While taking a shortcut home, scientist-turned-PI Mickey Maux stumbles across what looks to be a perfect mob hit: a stalled car with a body draped over the steering wheel, and one small-caliber shot to the temple. He reports the find to the police—specifically, to his high school friend, Detective Danny.

The body and the car are gone when the police reach the scene—replaced by another body in another car. Maux is determined to leave these murders to the police to solve, but he's drawn back into the investigation when a senator hires him to locate his missing bodyguard. Soon, Maux is mired in a mess involving drug smuggling, the mob, political corruption, and a crooked cop.

In this comic mystery, there's more than one "who's on first" routine, and plenty of word play, as when "Lebanese" is purposely confused with "lesbian." Allusions to Maux's inventions give way to oddball contrivances like the "Shit Ninny," a driverless mobile traffic enforcer, and the "Fingers," a quad-digit device mounted on vehicles that offers one-fingered salutes to incompetent drivers. They factor into the plot significantly, but they also highlight Maux's eccentricities, making him distinctive in a world of pistol-packing tough guys.

Making good use of allusions, references, and sub-references, Maux moves quickly from one action encounter to another, whirling through a circular, sometimes repetitive narrative that is loaded with social commentary on matters as disparate as mathematics and ballet, evolution and poker.

Maux arrives through his first-person point of view, though—sometimes too noticeably; other portions of the story are related in the third person. Stumbles over homonyms are a distraction, and one plot gap—Maux's version of events is at first disbelieved, but later becomes the police's touchstone—brings some pause.

Despite the oddities that drive it, the book's plot is entirely believable. Corruption and illegal drugs always pair well with crooked politicians, even in this story where the politician's corruption is disguised by a tailored suit and a veneer of blandness. The politician only appears on Maux's turf, though, and the threat is abstract, which helps sustain the lighthearted dynamic of the narrative.

The book's Connecticut and northeast corridor setting gets stellar coverage, especially when the book is following Maux from the Long Island Sound shore as far west as Hoboken, New Jersey. There are also treats for gourmets, with Maux and his spouse sitting down to more than one delectably described meal.

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