



Mobsters: It's Not Just a Game

Nelson Rodriguez

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There is the hint of a decent story buried just beneath the surface of Nelson Rodriguez's spare crime novella, the title of which is either *Mobster* or *Mobsters*, depending on whether you trust the front or the back cover, the title page, or the references in the text to the video game to which it refers. That annoying and confusing minor detail aside, there is something of value between these competing covers.

The story and the rough and almost always crude street patois in which its characters converse is quite solid and authentic. Some characters pop off the pages, coming to life when delivering lines like this girl's reply to a sleazy pick-up artist: "dam, you be going hard with that cute poetic shit you be spiting, you a prize for real huh anyway don't answer that."

The spelling, punctuation, and grammar—or lack thereof, as cited above—are indicative of how Rodriguez writes throughout his 91-page book. Battling through the bruised prose is hard on the eyes and ears, but there is some music herein for the reader who can look beyond the technical flaws.

The crime story is solid and brutal. It is a gritty tale of obsession, murder, and revenge played out on the streets of Garden City, the Bronx, and the other boroughs of New York. *Mobsters* is populated with some very real and colorful characters, among them Frank "The Barber" Watkins ("he got that name because when he was young he uses to stay cutting dudes on Riker's Island"), and Sam, the spoiled son of a drug lord so obsessed with being number one in a role-playing computer game he dispatches gunmen to kill off the competition. Battling these and other criminals is Mark, your basic good cop who is drawn into the case when a few people close to him are murdered by Sam's brutally violent henchmen.

Some of the prose is blue and lurid, such as "she fed his brains to the street with his blood as the extra gravy sauce of another life, claimed by the terrains of the concrete jungle." And most of the dialogue is so pickled with the F and N words as to be unprintable in a review, and while unsettling it does come across as true-to-life.

Mobsters is a hard read. It feels like the stream of consciousness notes a director would pencil into the margins of a raw movie script. There is some street poetry but it desperately needs a technician to polish and make readable.

As it stands now, *Mobsters* is seriously and perhaps even mortally flawed. It is a rough draft in need of several tough rewrites and the iron hand of an editor. Format, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and grammar (in the narrative if not the spoken dialogue) all scream not for a mere Band-Aid but for a tourniquet.

Nelson Rodriguez has made a good start on a rough draft, and there is much here that can be saved. He needs a guiding hand to take *Mobsters* to where it could and probably deserves to go.

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (January 6, 2012)

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