

Morgan 41

Bob Erlich

Robert N. Erlich

Unknown (pp)

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The cast of characters in *Morgan 41*, the third in Bob Erlich's Eli Rose crime/espionage series, includes willing, busty girls in skimpy bikinis, slimy, over-dressed Latin drug lords, greedy federal agents on the take, Caribbean gangstas, cartel hit men, and some aging, over-the-hill Cuban exiles.

Like *No Vacancy*, his first and best book in the trilogy, this novel is also set in Miami and the Caribbean. And, like that first novel, Erlich once again allows Vicente Amaron to grace its pages. The absence of Vicente's vibrant, charmingly comedic personality doomed the second book in the series, *The Next Best Man*, to the land of forgettable beach reads. Vicente's return here breathes life back into the series, much like a cool breeze over the Intracoastal chases away the oppressive doldrums of a Florida summer.

Although former CIA contractor, mercenary, and occasional private investigator Eli Rose is supposedly Erlich's principal character, he does not possess the gravitas to carry off an entire book, as was demonstrated in *The Next Best Man*.

Eli is a jaded, forty-something private detective, someone who himself admits is "just a beat up old guy that runs a lost and found office." While Eli does get the girls, the guns, and the adventures, Erlich's foray into middle-aged male fantasy fulfillment is pretty standard fare. If not for Vicente, who plays both mentor and sidekick, the Eli Rose series would be just another in a long list of detective paperbacks that are the equivalent of literary snacks, pleasant but not filling.

There is a good story running on two parallel tracks in *Morgan 41*. The one with Eli as the main character offers light entertainment, much like an episode of *Miami Vice*. There is a lot of action, a good bit of sex, some nice locales, and a few twists, most of which are telegraphed in advance to any reader paying attention.

The second plot line, starring Vicente, is much tighter and tenser. There is less physical action but much more psychological tension. Here, Erlich relies more on the verbal interplay and mental gamesmanship of the characters than he does on chases and shootouts. Like the character of Vicente himself, these parts of the book come across as much more realistic. Readers may find themselves skimming the Eli Rose parts just to get to any page where the gracefully aging Cuban exile makes an appearance.

Vicente and Eli are partners, and they are working toward the same goal in this story. That means their paths will eventually cross and meld into one. When that finally does happen, the novel works very well.

While not quite as good as the first book in Erlich's series, *Morgan 41* is an enjoyable read.

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (August 31, 2011)

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