

Myth Man

Alex Mueck

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With his second novel, Alex Mueck continues his use of the detective mystery format and introduces Dominick Presto, an NYPD homicide detective who lives with his mother. Presto is not an average cop. He loves food—both a master chef's finest filet as well as a diner cook's best burger—and has the girth to prove it. He also has a superb analytical brain, one that could put Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot to shame. The late actor Dom DeLuise would have been the perfect pick to play Presto in a movie version of this novel.

Fresh off a case where he provided the linking deductions that caught a killer, Presto is taking a stay-cation when he gets called to consult in an investigation of a cleric's murder. Presto is a laid-back, non-confrontational person. When Frank Danko, the lead detective on the case, huffs and puffs about the FBI stepping on his toes, Presto does his diplomatic best to smooth his colleague's ruffled feathers. Presto's actions in solving the previous case made Danko look like a buffoon, and Presto wants to make amends for that unintended consequence.

Presto suspects a priest's murder in St. Patrick's Cathedral is no isolated incident; a Muslim cleric's murder occurred a month earlier, and both men were killed on a holy day of their respective faiths. As the investigation into the priest's murder develops, Presto loses his place on the investigating team when someone spreads a rumor about him. Further murders take place, Presto is cleared of the allegations and gets back in the game.

His mother, hiding a serious illness, is trying to get him fixed up with a nice girl before her time is up. Presto ends up with two new female friends by book's end, and enjoys the company immensely. But his focus is always on the current case, trying to get a step ahead of the killer responsible for embroiling the city in a religion-based spat that threatens to turn into a war.

Presto follows the clues while doing his best not to alienate Danko; in addition to playing diplomat with his agency and the two FBI agents assigned to the case. His close friend, FBI agent Malcolm Bailey, clues him in on an important archaeological find that is being transferred in New York City soon, but Presto doesn't have much of a chance to ponder what might be in the heavily-guarded crate. Time is running out for him, those he cares about, and the religious citizens of the city when the serial killer reveals his self-selected name: Myth Man.

Mueck has crafted an engaging and well-paced mystery with a lead detective who's under no illusions about himself or what others think of his physical appearance. Humor is threaded throughout the novel, never too much or too little, and always in service of the story. The scenes with his mother—particularly when they're discussing his upcoming blind date—breathe with life and realism. All the characters are three-dimensional and their actions follow clearly established motivations.

The story follows a logical progression and the reader is never hoodwinked. All the information is there for the keen-minded reader to follow, along with the red herrings of misdirection that are vital to a well-told mystery. Mueck has done his homework well.

Mueck certainly has entertaining stories yet to tell. He could very well be a name to watch in the future.

J. G. STINSON (December 7, 2010)

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