Clarion Review

Mystery

Portrait of Deadly Excess
D. Jeffrey Ostling
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★★★☆☆
(August 2009)

When NYC artist, Daniel Kane, says, “I want to become one with my art—bleed inside the paint, live inside the canvass,” he wants people to believe he can literally transfer “flesh to paint and back to flesh.” It’s a fascinating premise for a story that involves a murder allegedly committed by a portrait that comes to life. There’s also a typically inept police force and an assortment of art world and underworld characters. And there’s ex-cop Addison Vance (Van) Hazard, now a marginally successful “new wave noir” artist but a very successful special claims insurance adjuster with a photographer girlfriend, Kyoko Dunne, a part-time model and motorcyclist. An action-thriller at the edge of horror-fantasy, Jeffrey Ostling’s debut novel provides unique insights into a world where “Night or day, few things are ever what they seem.”

Hazard is in trouble with his insurance consortium masters and the police because he won’t sign off on a hefty insurance claim. He believes that Kane, the artist at the centre of the claim—supposedly dead from a car crash—is still alive. Now, a fire has occurred at the home of one of Hazard’s artist friends. More paintings and sculptures have been destroyed. Two friends have died and a stranger, David Latimore, who Hazard rescues, is claiming a painting came to life and killed one of the victims. Hazard is hired by both the police and the consortium to investigate the fire and the murder. It isn’t long before he links his two cases and becomes involved with an art gallery owner, Les Madsen, who deals in forgeries, drugs, and gambling and has ties to a sadistic hood and his enforcers. Hazard and Kyoko barely escape with their lives in a spine-tingling knife and club fight outside “a bordello on wheels,” the best-written scene in the book.

Although uneven in its pacing, the novel presents the deadly excesses of the noir genre

in a unique framework of the art world. Detailed descriptions of physical violence are frequent and certain characters are truly monstrous. Others, like Hazard and Kyoko, are memorable for their personal characteristics. The ending leaves ample opportunity for another resurrection from the dead and a second adventure for Hazard and Kyoko.