

Presner the Remarkable

Don Eron

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Presner the Remarkable is a reflective novel in which an underdog dissects his idolization of an old friend.

A wedding prompts a midlife crisis in Don Eron's tragicomic novel *Presner the Remarkable*.

Presner once attended law school, but now he's working at a newsstand and writing a play. He's somewhat alone in the world: his sister and parents are dead. Billboards around Denver remind him that his law school rival, who once stole a love interest from him, is still coming out on top. Presner and the rest of their old friends (who are now successful lawyers too) have also been invited to the rival's wedding.

With the wedding approaching, Presner determines to work out, finish his play, and invite Lisa, who he wishes were more than his friend, as his date. He wants to make the best possible impression at the wedding. But a sour investment with Fitz, his favorite classmate who once helped him with his sister, takes Presner's focus; he works to vindicate Fitz in the resultant death.

Imitating a play, the book's five acts include a wedding and a funeral. Death plays a prominent role in Presner's life, as it does in the Anton Chekhov plays he emulates. Because of this, he's developed stoicism, solitude, and compassion. He's a self-proclaimed underdog whom the novel sets up as more of an antihero: he's the butt of his own jokes, and he speaks in run-on sentences that often go nowhere. Indeed, he's a show-off in conversations with others, which he treats not so much as mutual exchanges but as personal opportunities for one-liners.

Scenes set in seedy restaurants and small theaters evoke a down-home flavor despite the city setting. The prose is wry, even glib at times, blurring the lines between what is serious and what is a joke. And despite its five-act format, the book is more of an antiplay, with elements of both a comedy and a tragedy but occupying neither space fully. It is at its most successful when it concentrates on Presner's personal evolution: he becomes remarkable because of his friends, getting to know and love them anew. Indeed, he cedes center stage to them, highlighting their stories and cementing his status as a humble hero.

Presner's anecdotal memories are a charming feature that contribute to the book's gentle, if meandering, progression. As he engages them, Presner's mind begins to change; at last, he notes "I can't do the abstractions anymore." Pregnant silence takes the place of witty comebacks, imparting a final sense that Presner is about to speak—and finally say something of true consequence.

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MARI CARLSON (August 24, 2023)

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